

# British Birds

October 2013 • Vol.106 • 563–644

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Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2012





# British Birds

Established 1907, incorporating The Zoologist, established 1843

Published by BB 2000 Limited, trading as 'British Birds'

Registered Office: c/o Chappell Cole & Co, Heritage House, 34B North Cray Road, Bexley, Kent DA5 3LZ

ISSN 0007-0335

[www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)

## Editorial

Roger Riddington  
Spindrift, Eastshore,  
Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JS  
Tel: 01950 460080  
[editor@britishbirds.co.uk](mailto:editor@britishbirds.co.uk)

'News & comment' material to  
Adrian Pitches

[adrianpitches@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:adrianpitches@blueyonder.co.uk)

## Subscriptions & administration

Hazel Jenner  
4 Harlequin Gardens,  
St Leonards on Sea,  
East Sussex TN37 7PF  
Tel & fax: 01424 755155  
[subscriptions@britishbirds.co.uk](mailto:subscriptions@britishbirds.co.uk)

## Design & production

Mark Corliss  
[m.corliss@netmatters.co.uk](mailto:m.corliss@netmatters.co.uk)

## Advertising

Mathew Hance, Digital Spring Ltd,  
Adam House, 7-10 Adam Street,  
The Strand, London WC2N 6AA  
Tel: 020 7520 9326  
[BBAdsales@digital-spring.co.uk](mailto:BBAdsales@digital-spring.co.uk)

## Guidelines for contributors

See [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)

## British Birds

Editorial staff Roger Riddington (Editor),  
Caroline Dudley, Peter Kennerley  
Editorial Board Dawn Balmer, Ian Carter,  
Richard Chandler, Martin Collinson,  
Mark Holling, Chris Kehoe, Robin  
Prytherch, Nigel Redman, Roger  
Riddington, Brian Small, Steve Votier

## Rarities Committee

Adam Rowlands (Chairman), Chris Batty,  
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Nic Hallam, James Lidster, Richard  
Millington, Mike Pennington,  
Richard Schofield, Steve Votier  
Secretary Nigel Hudson, Carn Ithen, Trench  
Lane, Old Town, St Mary's, Scilly TR21 0PA;  
[secretary@bbrc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@bbrc.org.uk)

## Notes Panel

Angela Turner (Chair), Will Cresswell,  
Ian Dawson, Jim Flegg, Ian Newton,  
Malcolm Ogilvie

## Annual subscription rates

Individual subscriptions: UK – £53.00  
Overseas (airmail) – £60.00  
Libraries and agencies – £99.00

## Back issues

available from [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)  
or the subscriptions office.

Printed by Hastings Printing Company

*British Birds* is owned and published by BB 2000 Limited, the directors of which are John Eyre (Chairman), Jeremy Greenwood, Mark Holling, Conor Jameson, Ciaran Nelson, Ian Packer, Adrian Pitches and Richard Porter. BB 2000 Limited is wholly owned by The British Birds Charitable Trust (registered charity No. 1089422), whose trustees are Richard Chandler, Jeremy Greenwood, Ian Newton and Peter Oliver. Directors and trustees are volunteers who draw no remuneration.

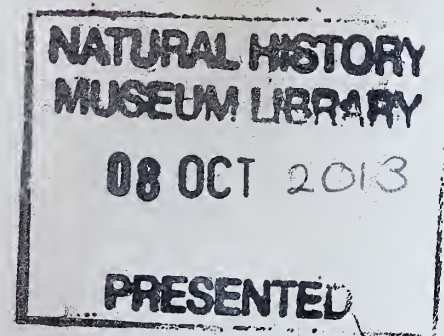
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Front-cover photograph: Juvenile Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*, Fair Isle, October 2012.  
Record numbers of Lanceolated Warblers were seen in Britain in 2012. *Rebecca Nason*



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The BBRC chairman, Adam Rowlands, has penned a thought-provoking *BB eye* this month, delving into some of the issues that confront any committee tasked with assessing the veracity of other people's records. The idea that rarity assessment is as much about human psychology as it is about bird identification is a guaranteed way to start a birding debate, whether in the pub after a local bird club meeting or in the car on the way back from a failed twitch. It probably contains more truth than many of us would care to admit.

Adam has some fascinating statistics on the changing proportions of both single-observer records and those supported by hard evidence (mainly photographs but also sound recordings). For most of my birding life, decent photos of those scarce or rare birds that you looked back on at the end of the year were as rare as the birds themselves. Instead, you had your memories, your notes and maybe some sketches (that quite possibly looked suspiciously like they weren't fully executed in the field). Now, images of many rarities are commonplace.

How will history regard the period between birdwatchers laying down the gun and picking up the digital camera? There is a wealth of psychological research into human short-term visual memory which shows very clearly that visual memory is not particularly dependable – we tend to recall what we *think* (or expect) we saw and not what we *actually* saw – and memory can be affected by all sorts of extraneous influences, such as other birders and reference to field guides. Remember how in the old days you were supposed to take notes *at the time* and never take a field guide into the field?

You could argue that, all things being equal, birders in the pre-digital era were better observers (having to work at their observation skills and train their memory) than the generation we seem destined to become – picture-takers who don't really observe, because there's no need to. Nowadays, you can look at the bird through the viewfinder, finger on the trigger, ten frames a second, bird in focus – kerboom! – evidence in the bag and on to the next one. I'm in my fifth year of carrying a DSLR whenever I go birding, and I still struggle with getting the right balance between watching a good bird and trying to photograph it; mostly I suspect I do too much of the latter and not enough of the former. Nonetheless, with a developing trend for rarities to be reidentified after the event, when all of the evidence is available, I can't help feeling that the days of the rarity finder who heads out for a day's birding unfettered by a sack of digital devices are numbered.

*Roger Riddington*



**British Birds aims to:** ❖ provide an up-to-date magazine for everyone interested in the birds of the Western Palearctic; ❖ publish a range of material on behaviour, conservation, distribution, ecology, identification, movements, status and taxonomy as well as the latest ornithological news and book reviews; ❖ maintain its position as the journal of record; and  
❖ interpret scientific research on birds in an easily accessible way.



## The challenges of assessing records of rare birds

The proportion of records accepted by BBRC appears to be on the increase. This rate was relatively stable for many years, at about 80%, but in the last two years it has increased, with the acceptance rate in 2012 falling just a whisker short of 90%.

What could be the reasons for this increase? The rapid development of digital technology is undoubtedly a key factor, combined with similar improvements in communications technology. The concept of being able to broadcast the news of a rare bird to a wide audience as soon as it is found would have been staggering to BBRC members little more than 25 years ago. In those days, it would have been a matter of luck if the bird had lingered long enough for one of a small band of bird photographers to capture an identifiable image of it. The existence of those images would have been announced by the lucky photographer to those arriving to see the bird, via an impromptu car-boot sale of prints featuring their best recent rare-bird images. In the days before birding magazines became awash with photographs, never mind the internet, this was the only way to build a personal reference library of such images. Nowadays, many (most?) observers carry a camera of some description, to be used for taking either stills or videos through a telescope or with a telephoto lens. Images of the latest rarity are now commonly available as the bird is found or – at least – shortly after someone else has broadcast the news of a find. Many birders also carry some form of recording device, or at least can call upon their mobile phone to capture the song or calls of a potential vagrant.

This level of evidence has undoubtedly enabled a higher proportion of records to be ‘proved’ by the finders or by subsequent observers. A comparison between the records for 1992 and 2012 shows an increase from 9% to 63% for the percentage that were submitted to BBRC with supporting photographic evidence, those with sound recordings increasing from 0% to 3% during the same period. The proportion of single-observer claims has remained relatively static,

at about 13% over the past two decades, suggesting that improvements in communication have not reduced the likelihood of an observer being the only person to enjoy a rarity. However, the proportion of *photographed* single-observer rarities increased from less than 1% to nearly 60%. Even so, the 40% of single-observer records in this report that were accepted despite a lack of photographic evidence shows that such records are not treated as unacceptable by definition, despite concerns that this may be the case.

This analysis suggests that there is no evidence of an increasing reticence by lone observers of rarities that are not photographed or sound-recorded to submit their observations, as is sometimes claimed. There are, of course, still plenty of birding situations more likely to generate such records. It remains a major challenge to secure digital evidence of birds seen on seawatches or from boats, while a brief encounter with a skulking passerine or fly-over raptor are similarly problematic. Some observers cover remote islands or sites with restricted access, which makes it less feasible for other observers to share their finds. All these circumstances have traditionally provided the Committee with its most challenging assessments and this remains true. This is where the semantics of the terminology we deploy becomes important. We do not reject records, we find them not proven. The conscious decision to use this terminology consistently was introduced by Nigel Hudson when he took over the Secretarial role. It allows us to reinforce that not accepting a record does *not* mean that we necessarily believe that the observer made a mistake. It simply means that we consider the evidence obtained was insufficient for the Committee to accept the record.

This provides a frustration to some of the most talented rarity finders in the UK. There is no doubt that there is a small minority of observers who possess phenomenal abilities to identify rare birds in the briefest of circumstances. This phenomenon was described by the psychologist Malcolm Gladwell, in his 2005 book *Blink: the power of thinking without*



thinking as 'thin-slicing'. He described the ability of top-level sportsmen to achieve the 'ideal response' in their particular sport without necessarily being able to articulate or consciously rationalise how they did it. He recognised that the same talent is common to the sharpest birders. He used the well-known North American observer David Sibley to illustrate his point, describing how Sibley had identified the first Ruff *Calidris pugnax* for his state in flight and knew instantly what the species was, despite never having seen it before. There are observers in the UK who can identify Blyth's Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus dumetorum* in flight, but does that mean we should accept such records, without any further supporting evidence, on reputation alone?

The main problem is that we are all capable of making mistakes. Top birders are not only capable of identifying rare birds on the briefest of views, they will also admit that they are sometimes tricked by a brief view. This is something that has been touched on many times, perhaps most amusingly by Meiklejohn in 1950, when he described the Bare-fronted Hoodwink *Dissimulatrix spuria*, but certainly before and since. The very best birders are those who are able to recognise that they make errors but then learn from them. With this comes the ability to recognise when to let a record go. All birders will have tales of 'the one that got away' and the fine line between an accepted and a not-proven decision often relates to where this line is drawn. In some cases, Committee members are unanimous that they have reached the right decision, but in others there is disagreement between the voting members about where that threshold lies. This emphasises the fact that observers should not consider a not-proven decision a reflection on their own judgement or abilities. Our voting constitution determines that a minority of members can ensure that a record is deemed not proven, although this situation is extremely rare in practice. Less than 5% of not-proven records were determined on a minority decision in 2011. In that same year the number of split votes that were determined not proven (i.e. a majority in favour of

this outcome, but not a unanimous decision) was 42%, while there were 53% unanimous not-proven decisions. Only 30% of the not-proven records involved single-observers and 25% were photographed. So, we find that the majority of single-observer records *do* get accepted, but also that a photo does not necessarily guarantee acceptance. Record assessment requires a judgement based on a range of factors and ultimately decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis on the evidence presented.

When any assessment results in a split vote, particularly those with a narrow majority or where voting members have indicated that there is some uncertainty in their decision, there is always a process of review before we conclude. Any record that has one or two not-proven votes is recirculated around the full Committee before a final decision is reached (see our Constitution for this and more about our voting procedures at [www.bbrc.org.uk/about/constitution](http://www.bbrc.org.uk/about/constitution)). This process avoids the opportunity for any individual to have an unfair influence on a record's fate, another accusation that has been occasionally levelled at BBRC in the past.

We plan to publish some of the close calls in *BB* and on the BBRC website in the coming months, to help birders to understand the assessment process (and to enable feedback and dialogue). We welcome the support of the observers involved and their willingness to allow their records to be used for this purpose. Ultimately, there is often no absolute right or wrong decision in many cases of record assessment, and an outcome should certainly not be taken as a reflection on the character of the observer. We hope that this will encourage observers not to take offence if 'not proven' is the outcome from one of their own observations and to continue to engage with us and in the process of rarity assessment in the future. The BBRC archive hosts a number of not-proven records from current and previous members of the Committee, including me. It is all part of the learning process that is birding!

*Adam Rowlands* on behalf of BBRC

What do you think? Join the debate at [www.britishbirds.co.uk/category/editorials](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/category/editorials)



# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

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## RSPB says ‘Frack off’

The RSPB has issued its first objection to fracking proposals by Cuadrilla in Lancashire over concerns that the controversial drilling for shale gas will harm wildlife and the climate. The drilling site at Singleton, near Blackpool, is close to the Ribble Estuary, which has internationally important wintering populations of Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* and Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus*.

The RSPB is also officially objecting to the contentious plans to explore for oil and gas at Balcombe in Sussex on the grounds that no Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out, and because increasing oil and gas use will scupper our chances of meeting climate targets.

Harry Huyton, RSPB Head of Climate and Energy Policy, said: ‘Balcombe has hit the headlines as the battleground in the debate over fracking. The public there are rightly concerned about the impact this new technology will have on their countryside. These are not just nimbys worried about house prices – there is a very real public disquiet about fracking. We have looked closely at the rules in place to police drilling for shale gas and oil, and they are simply not robust enough to ensure that our water, our landscapes and our wildlife are safe.

‘Cuadrilla boss and former energy secretary Lord Howell claims that when he made his much

publicised howler about fracking in the “desolate North East” he actually meant the North West. There may not be as many local residents as in Sussex, but this area is protected by European law because it is so valuable for wildlife and Cuadrilla has done nothing to investigate what damage their activities could do to it.’

Mr Huyton added: ‘Government figures show that in the north of England there is potential for 5,000 fracking sites and a total of up to 100,000 wells. The idea that these will not have an impact on the countryside is very difficult to believe.’

Meanwhile, RSPB HQ has embraced renewable energy and applied for planning permission to erect a wind turbine at The Lodge in Bedfordshire. If the plans are approved, then the turbine (measuring 100 m at its highest point) is predicted to produce the equivalent of two-thirds of the RSPB’s total UK electricity needs.

Martin Harper, Conservation Director of the RSPB, said: ‘A wind turbine at our UK headquarters is the single biggest step we can take to reduce our carbon emissions. We know that wind turbines in the wrong place can damage wildlife, and we have objected to proposals up and down the country that we believe would harm species. However, all the evidence shows that when they are sited carefully, wind turbines can produce clean, green energy without harming birds and other species.’

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## Sea Eagles and Cranes breed in eastern Scotland

For the first time in almost two centuries White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* have bred in the east of mainland Scotland. A pair released in 2009 as part of the reintroduction project using birds from Norway has raised one chick in a woodland nest in Fife.

During 2007–12, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland reintroduced a total of 85 young White-tailed Eagles to Scotland’s east coast. This population complements the reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles to western Scotland from 1975, also using chicks from Norway.

And for the first time since the Middle Ages, Common Cranes *Grus grus* have bred in Scotland. These stately birds have successfully raised a single chick in both 2012 and 2013 in North-east Scot-

land, the first confirmed successful nesting north of the border for hundreds of years.

Historical records and place-names indicate that Cranes were once well established in Scotland but died out centuries ago, primarily due to hunting and their popularity as a dish at medieval banquets. Habitat loss and a slow reproductive cycle probably hastened their disappearance.

Stuart Housden, Director of RSPB Scotland, said: ‘We are stunned and delighted to see that Cranes have bred successfully in Scotland. These charming, elegant birds have a strong place in our myths and history and are a delight to see, particularly during the breeding season with their “dancing” displays. They undertake regular migrations and small numbers have turned up on the east coast of Scotland in recent years, raising hopes



of a recolonisation. Last year the pair reared one chick – followed by a second chick in 2013.’

As the most recent report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel revealed in last month’s *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 106: 528), the breeding population in eastern England is holding its own and there are now two pairs in Yorkshire. The reintroduction project in the Somerset Levels is also set to produce its first wild-bred Cranes soon – yet another long-legged colonist of these revitalised wetlands.



RSPB-images.com

**328.** Adult Common Crane *Grus grus* with chick.

## Avalon 'ave a lot to celebrate

Even before Cranes start nesting, the Avalon Marshes in Somerset have had their best year yet for breeding birds. One year after the first nesting pair of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* for the UK, two pairs nested in 2013: one pair at Natural England’s Shapwick Heath reserve (producing two young) while a new pair within the RSPB’s Ham Wall reserve produced three young.

The RSPB reserve at Ham Wall has also been host to a nesting pair of Little Bitterns *Ixobrychus minutus*. This is the only known UK breeding location for this shy member of the heron family and this year two young birds fledged successfully. Three male birds were heard giving their distinctive barking calls in the dog days of July.

And Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* have had another very successful year across the Avalon Marshes with as many as 33 booming males, meaning that the Somerset Levels now rivals Norfolk/Suffolk as THE hotspot for this species. Alongside the nesting bitterns and egrets, the wetlands have also provided a home for Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*, with four nests producing 13 young.

The Avalon Marshes is a huge wetland site to the west of Glastonbury managed by Natural England, the Somerset Wildlife Trust, the Hawk and Owl Trust and the RSPB. It has been recreated

from abandoned peat diggings in the valley of the River Brue.

Ray Summers, RSPB warden for Ham Wall, said: ‘We are all absolutely delighted. Since we took on the land at Ham Wall back in the mid 1990s, we’ve been working hard to recreate a pristine wetland. To have all these nesting egrets, bitterns and harriers is a fantastic seal of approval for the work we’ve done, it really demonstrates the quality of the site for wildlife.’

‘We are also enormously grateful for the team of dedicated volunteers who have worked hard this summer to protect the birds and keep them safe from disturbance.’

Tony Whitehead, RSPB, said: ‘Having all these birds breeding successfully in the Avalon Marshes demonstrates the power of landscape-scale nature conservation. If you get the conditions right, the birds will turn up.’

‘Wetlands are under pressure the world over, not least from climate change. To be able to recreate this landscape in Somerset is of huge significance. We know that large, well-managed wetlands can act as centres of establishment for colonising species such as Little Bittern and be crucial in helping them adapt to our changing climate, as is being demonstrated in the Avalon Marshes.’

## New county bird recorders

**Caernarfonshire** Rhion Pritchard, Pant Afonig, Hafod Lane, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 4BU; tel. 01248 671301; e-mail rhion678pritchard@btinternet.com

**Montgomeryshire** Mike Haigh, Tynewydd Ketch, Llanfyllin SY22 5EU; tel. 01691 648746; e-mail montbird@gmail.com



## Buzzard ‘control’ – the BB eye debate

Ian Carter’s thoughtful guest editorial in last month’s *BB* explored birders’ outraged reaction to the decision by Natural England to grant a limited number of Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* control licences at the request of game shoots.

He argued that our response was *cultural* in that we feel birds of prey – however buoyant their populations – are more worthy of protection than the thousands of pigeons, crows and gulls controlled under licence every year.

Ian wrote: ‘Our strong feelings appear to be an instinctive reaction to the control of a species that has no recent history of legal control in Britain. And, as it is a bird of prey at the top of the food chain, we perhaps accord it an elevated status. For reasons that are not clearly defined, it is evidently deemed to be more worthy of complete protection than say a humble gull or a species of wildfowl.’

There has been a vigorous debate on our website [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk) with more than 30 comments posted within a week. The following paragraphs give a flavour of the debate.

‘For me, the issue is not about comparing the “value” of different species but the reason that is put forward for killing a species. So, killing Buzzards to protect Pheasants *Phasianus colchicus*, reared in millions, seems to me to be obscene.

Near me, Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* sometimes prey on Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* chicks, which are naturally raised in very small numbers (compared with Pheasants), so I think that a licence to kill one or two Kestrels would be justified.’ (Ian Spence)

‘Those who torpedoed the planned Defra-funded Buzzard control research have much to answer for. As the National Gamekeepers’ Organisation commented at the time, “The deflection of this research means that in future licence applications will just have to be judged without the benefit of independent scientific advice on possible non-lethal alternatives. It is hard to see how that leaves Buzzards better off.” So it has proved.’ (Charles Nodder)

‘Where is the trial of netted Pheasant poult release pens from Natural England or GWCT? Rather than being framed in terms of encouraging farmers and gamekeepers to coexist with a healthy Buzzard population, the proposals were simply about the best methods of removal’. (Alan Tilmouth)

Visit the website to follow more of the debate. Ian Carter has posted *his* response to the debate at: [www.britishbirds.co.uk/editorials/the-culture-of-killing-a-response-by-the-author](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/editorials/the-culture-of-killing-a-response-by-the-author)

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## Bird Sense – what it’s like to be a bird

... is the title of the Bernard Tucker Memorial lecture, given by Tim Birkhead, on 4th November 2013 (at 7.45 pm at Exeter Hall, Kidlington). Bernard Tucker was the editor of *BB* for seven years until his untimely death in 1950, and this event is sponsored by *BB*. Tim is one of the most

entertaining speakers on birds around, but if you can’t make it to Oxford to hear his presentation, you can enjoy the next best thing by reading an article, based on the talk, which will appear in *BB* sometime next year. Visit [www.oos.org.uk/programme.php](http://www.oos.org.uk/programme.php) for more details.

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## European Ornithologists’ Union conference, 2013

When 150 birdwatchers arrive *en masse* at Titchwell and simultaneously another 150 do the same at Minsmere, it might be a sign that something important is on the move. When this happened on a Friday in late August 2013 something important was certainly rolling through. These 300 folk were not chasing birds, however, they were chasing ideas, new data, new contacts; they were the delegates to the ninth conference of the European Ornithologists’ Union (EOU), on a mid-conference field trip. Such trips are a feature of these meetings, which bring together ornithologists from across Europe every two years. This year’s conference was the first to visit the UK and was based at the campus of the University of East

Anglia in Norwich. So the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts were the natural places to show off to delegates all that is good about British birds and their conservation.

The main host of this conference was the BOU, for whom Steve Dudley brought considerable conference organising skills to this key event. The local organising committee was chaired by the BTO’s Rob Fuller, while UEA’s Jenny Gill (also the BOU President) supplied the all-important local contacts and knowledge.

Altogether there were 110 oral presentations spread over 22 symposia plus five plenary lectures, and over 130 posters (including an impressive number from students). The range of topics of the



showpiece plenary lectures ranged from courtship displays of mannikins *Lonchura* (Leo Fusani, Italy), the migratory behaviour of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* (Jenny Gill, UK), breeding biology and movements of Montagu's Harriers *Circus pygargus* (Beatriz Arroyo, Spain), foraging in insectivores (Anton Krištin, Slovakia) to the new techniques which are revolutionising our understanding of bird movements across the globe (Åke Lindström, Sweden). Topics within symposia were extraordinarily broad, from the applied problems of birds colliding with aircraft and with glass structures, to climate change effects on all aspects of bird biology; the migratory patterns of birds which travel between Europe and Africa, and their implications for conservation, to coloniality, ethno-ornithology and dispersal.

Anyone can join the EOU; membership is free through the website ([www.eouunion.org](http://www.eouunion.org)) where the

true international flavour of ornithological research and its applications are presented and discussed. The site is a great complement to the BOU website ([www.bou.org.uk](http://www.bou.org.uk)). The EOU and BOU (who spent £10,000 supporting over 50 students from 20 countries to attend the conference) worked together exceptionally well to make this a really outstanding conference, aided by some surprisingly (at least to many foreign delegates) warm and sunny weather, which meant that discussions could continue outside the bar late into the evening and down by the lake early morning. Many new ideas were hatched, and friendships and collaborations formed. The next EOU conference will have a lot to live up to; Norwich set a high benchmark.

(contributed by Graham Martin, University of Birmingham)

## Scarce migrants

In the November issue of *BB*, some corrections to the scarce migrants reports (published in July and August this year) will be published. If you are aware of any errors, please contact

us at [editor@britishbirds.co.uk](mailto:editor@britishbirds.co.uk)

An updated file on our website will take account of any corrections received too late for the November issue.

## In praise of... October

If there's one month in the calendar when every weather forecast has to be scrutinised minutely and all social engagements have to be screened accordingly, it's October. Among the returning wildfowl, waders and winter thrushes will be a sprinkling of 'Sibes' from the East and 'Yanks' from the West. Some years deliver extraordinary birds from both hemispheres: 1975, 1985, 1995 and 2005 all spring to mind. (So yes, book that island observatory for October 2015!) October is *the* month when a species that may never have featured on the dedicated rarity hunter's 'possibles' list arrives on a long-haul flight from the shores of Lake Baikal. What will be this year's Rufous-tailed Robin *Larvivora sibilans* or Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus*?



Kit Day

**329.** Canada Warbler *Cardellina canadensis*, Kilbaha, Co. Clare, October 2006. Currently one of just a small handful of species on the Irish List but not the British List, and just one of many Americans that could be a disruptive influence on birders' social calendars this month.

**For extended versions of many of the stories featured here, and much more, visit our website [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)**



# Report on rare birds



giving  
nature  
a home

# in Great Britain in 2012

Nigel Hudson and the Rarities Committee

This is the 55th annual report of the British Birds Rarities Committee. In general, the crop of rarities in 2012 fell below the level of the exceptional year of 2011. There was no repeat of the extraordinary influx of Pallid Harriers *Circus macrourus* in the autumn, although the three spring records and one autumn adult would have been an impressive haul in most years. In a similar vein, three Red-flanked Bluetails *Tarsiger cyanurus* would have been a record year before 1998, but this now seems a poor showing, in fact the worst since 2005. A generally poor autumn for eastern vagrants on the English east coast also saw numbers of Hume's Warblers *Phylloscopus humei* return to more typical levels after the glut in 2011, although eastern *Locustella* warblers put in a good showing, including no fewer than three British mainland Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers *L. certhiola* (and one Lanceolated Warbler *L. lanceolata*), species that normally require a trip to the Northern Isles. One of the main events of the autumn was an exceptional arrival of Olive-backed Pipits *Anthus hodgsoni*, which ensured that 2012 became the last year that the species would feature on the BBRC list. It was interesting to see the number of accounts from finders which suggested that they were intentionally searching for this species when they found it – proof that more or less instant communication of rare-bird news enables rarity hunters to target certain species when they are arriving in good numbers. Buff-bellied Pipit *A. rubescens* was another pipit that appeared in record numbers, with a double-figure total for the first time in a single year. This record-breaking influx was followed by one of another rarity that originates in Greenland and northern Canada: a 'broad-front arrival'

of the delightful 'Hornemann's Redpoll' *Carduelis h. hornemanni*, which enabled observers away from the usual hotspots in the Northern Isles and the Outer Hebrides to enjoy these confiding, frosty finches.

The impact of climate patterns on vagrancy was clearly apparent in 2012 with significant influxes of Glossy Ibises *Plegadis falcinellus*, Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* and Baillon's Crakes *Porzana pusilla*. These arrivals are all likely to have been a result of drought conditions in the Iberian Peninsula, which forced many individuals of these species to stray north of their typical range. The exceptional spring and summer flooding in Britain no doubt made many sites that much more appealing for wetland species. Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybrida* were apparently also driven north in spring 2012 (Graham White pers. comm.) but appeared to stop short of crossing the Channel in significant numbers. Such periodic influxes challenge our definition of what should be considered a rare bird. We have now removed Glossy Ibis from the BBRC list as a consequence of repeated influxes in recent years but (at the time of writing) there has been no significant arrival in 2013. The influx of Baillon's Crakes also proved to have been an isolated event, and the suspicion that they may have been previously overlooked appears unfounded. Less isolated is the establishment of breeding Little Bitterns *Ixobrychus minutus* in Somerset. The appearance of the juveniles at this site led the Committee to review how records of fledged young, hatched in Britain, are treated in the BBRC statistics. We have not been consistent in this respect in the past, with some young being counted and others not. We have determined that such birds *will* be included in the



statistics – and this could potentially hasten the demise of Little Bittern as a BBRC species if the breeding population continues to grow.

The rarest birds featured in this report are as follows:

- 1st White-winged Scoter *Melanitta d. deglandi*, ‘Asian Red-rumped Swallow’ *Cecropis d. daurica/japonica*
- 2nd Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*, Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia*
- 2nd & 3rd Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*
- 3rd Canada Goose *Branta canadensis interior/parvipes*, Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*
- 5th ‘American Black Tern’ *Chlidonias niger surinamensis*
- 6th Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis*, Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*
- 6th & 7th Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*
- 7th Eleonora’s Falcon *Falco eleonora*
- 9th Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope*
- 9th & 10th Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*
- 10th Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*

Although the number of records considered for the current report year – 611 compared with 633 in 2011 – may indicate another high-quality year, the number of taxa considered is well down and the major arrivals of Glossy Ibis and Olive-backed Pipit have skewed the totals somewhat. The overall

acceptance rate increased again, to 89.8%, which almost certainly reflects changes in the approach to documenting and recording rarities, and in particular the increase in photographic evidence.

The effort required to process 700+ records for the annual report continues to have an impact on our ability to complete the assessment of more complex records or species reviews. The reviews of Macaronesian Shearwater *Puffinus baroli*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Royal Tern *Sterna maxima* and ‘Eastern Subalpine Warbler’ *Sylvia cantillans albistriata* records continued, but failed to reach a conclusion in time for the report. Records of Glaucous-winged *Larus glaucescens* and Slaty-backed Gull *L. schistisagus*, among others, are still under consideration.

We are, however, able to report the first records of White-winged Scoter and Asian Red-rumped Swallow. The former has the rather dubious distinction of being the first bird to have its admittance to the British List announced via a BBC TV programme, when it featured on the *One Show* in July! BOURC is also currently considering records of Thayer’s Gull *L. (glaucoides) thayeri*, Pale-legged Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tenellipes*, ‘Moltoni’s Subalpine Warbler’ *S. (cantillans) moltonii*, ‘Eastern Grasshopper Warbler’ *Locustella naevia straminea*, ‘Eastern Black Redstart’ *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides* and Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* of the form *stejnegeri*.

The series of Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans* and ‘orange-billed’ tern records is still awaiting the results of genetic research in Europe, with further material having been obtained from French orange-billed terns during 2013. We also hope to be able to announce the outcome of the Druridge Bay Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* review shortly. Less fortunately for field birders, taxonomic developments among the ‘Madeiran Storm-petrel’ group have led to the relegation of two recently accepted records to a group of three cryptic species now recognised by BOURC. The gauntlet is now down for intrepid seabirders to work on criteria that enable field identification, from land or sea, but this is clearly not going to be an easy task.

	2012	2011	2010	2009
Acceptances				
– current year	567	568	467	459
Not Proven				
– current year	44	65	59	62
Acceptances				
– previous years	79	74	56	104
Not Proven				
– previous years	29	24	38	50
TOTAL	729	731	620	675
Corrections	12	4	6	11
Taxa in accepted records	114	127	117	113



The Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda* review has concluded and is reported here, unsurprisingly confirming that all records relate to this species (rather than its sister species, Balearic Warbler *S. balearica*). We have also reached a decision (of sorts) on the stint that lingered in Devon in spring 2009. It proved impossible to achieve a consensus as to whether this bird was a Western *Calidris mauri* or Semipalmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla* so we decided that the best option is to report it as an 'either/or'. Another thorny identification has been resolved thanks to DNA results, which supported the identification of the 2010 Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* in Yorkshire. Molecular evidence is a completely new realm that BBRC members (selected largely on the basis of their field identification skills) now have to take into account. We are fortunate to have Steve Votier as a current serving member, who is well qualified to help assess this evidence, while Martin Collinson has kindly accepted our offer to act as a genetic consultant to

BBRC and provide supporting advice in cases where the molecular research has been conducted by a third party. (Both Steve and Martin are current members of the BOU's Taxonomic Sub-committee). In cases where molecular research has contributed to the documentation supporting the identification of a rarity, we will include reference to 'DNA analysis' in the record in our report. This is in keeping with the use of the word 'photo', which is generally reserved for cases where the photo has been instrumental in supporting the identification. This helps us to distinguish those cases where record photos are submitted but do not provide sufficient evidence to confirm the identification.

We have received some correspondence questioning why we report records of birds in song as males, particularly in the case of several warbler species. We recognise that some females of the species concerned may also sing, so in some cases we may be incorrect to sex the bird. However, our assumption is that most of the birds that arrive as vagrants and sing persistently are most likely to be males and we have therefore decided to retain this convention.

The swansong of Glossy Ibis and Olive-backed Pipit in this report comes shortly after the publication of the 'Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain' for 2004–07 in the July and August issues of *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 106: 368–404, 448–476). A further scarce migrant report, covering the years 2008–10, is in preparation and will be published in *BB* in the first half of 2014. These two reports will enable us to assess the relative rarity of some species that have been removed from the BBRC list in previous years but are now below the threshold of occurrence and could be readmitted. We are keen to ensure that species do not 'yo-yo' on and off the list in relation to relatively minor fluctuations in occurrence and we are currently investigating sensible criteria for readmittance. We hope to reach a position on this at our next AGM, in spring 2014.

The BBRC Twitter account was launched in March and you can now follow the latest decisions as they happen @\_BBRC as well as keeping up to date



Brydon Thomason

**330.** Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, October 2012, the last year for the species on the BBRC list.



with BBRC news on our website ([www.bbrc.org.uk](http://www.bbrc.org.uk)). We are grateful to all the observers who have submitted records via the online form on our website and we encourage all observers to submit their records in this format.

## Acknowledgments

BBRC continues to be supported financially by Carl Zeiss Ltd, a relationship that has endured now for 32 years. This, along with the support of RSPB, is invaluable in enabling BBRC to function and we remain extremely grateful to both sponsors.

We wish to thank all the observers and photographers who sent details of their rare-bird observations to BBRC, either directly or via County Recorders or the BirdGuides and/or Rare Bird Alert online galleries. Once again we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to county and regional recorders and their records committees for the invaluable work that they undertake in supporting BBRC. Thanks also go to all those individuals who updated information on earlier sightings or through correspondence, following the posting of work-in-progress files on the BBRC website throughout the year. While they may not be

acknowledged in the report, their contribution remains very significant for improving the accuracy of the information provided. BirdGuides has continued to assist the Committee, particularly by enabling the submission of photographs for consideration by BBRC. We are also grateful to Dominic Mitchell and the staff at *Birdwatch* magazine for assisting the Committee's work. We thank the following in particular for their support in various ways during the year: Steve Arlow, Malcolm Ausden, Arnoud van den Berg, Dave Britton, Mark Constantine and the Sound Approach team, Steve Dudley, Chris Gibbins, Andrew Harrop, Chris Kehoe, Peter Kennerley, Paul Leader, John Martin, Chris McInerney, Killian Mullarney, Keith Naylor, Richard Porter, Magnus Robb and Graham White. Martin Collinson has agreed to act as our Genetic Consultant. John Marchant continued in his role as Archivist, Reg Thorpe as Summariser and Brian Small as Museum Consultant. We also thank the *Dutch Birding* team for providing electronic copies of papers from that journal for reference; Ian Lewington for our logo; the BTO for their continued generosity in providing space and facilities for our archive; and all the staff at the NHM, Tring, for their continued support for our work and for allowing unlimited access to the specimens in the collection.

*Adam Rowlands*

## Systematic list of accepted records

The principles and procedures followed in considering records were explained in the 1958 report (*Brit. Birds* 53: 155–158). The following points show the basis on which the list has been compiled:

1. The details included for each record are (1) county; (2) locality; (3) number of birds if more than one, and age and sex if known (in the case of spring and summer records, however, the age is normally given only where the bird concerned was not in adult plumage); (4) dates; (5) if photographed, sound-recorded and/or DNA analysis carried out (and this evidence assessed by the Committee); (6) if trapped or found dead and where specimen is stored, if known; and (7) observer(s), in alphabetical order.
2. In general, this report is confined to records which are regarded as certain, and 'probables' are not included. In cases of the very similar Eastern Bonelli's *Phylloscopus orientalis* and Western Bonelli's Warblers *P. bonelli*, however, we publish indeterminate records, and this also applies to Canada/Cackling Geese *Branta canadensis/hutchinsii*, frigatebirds *Fregata*, Zino's/Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae*, White-bellied/Black-bellied Storm-petrels *Fregetta grallaria/tropica*, Western/Semi-palmated Sandpipers *Calidris mauri/pusilla* in non-breeding plumage, and Booted/Sykes's Warblers *Iduna caligata/rama* (see also *Brit. Birds* 94: 395).
3. The sequence of species, English names and scientific nomenclature follow the 'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic; see [www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/the-british-birds-list/](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/the-british-birds-list/)
4. The three numbers in parentheses after each species name refer specifically to the total number of individuals recorded in Britain (i) to the end of 1949 (these statistics are kindly supplied by Keith Naylor – note that they may vary slightly between reports, as his continuing research brings more accuracy to the numbers), (ii) for the period since 1950, but excluding (iii) those listed here for the current year. The decision as to how many individuals were involved is often difficult, but a consensus view is represented by 'probably/presumed same' (counted as the same in the totals); records for which it is less certain whether the birds involved were the same or not are counted as different in the totals. An identical approach is applied to records of a particular species recurring at the same, or a nearby, locality after a lapse of time. In considering claims of more than one individual at the same or adjacent localities, the Committee requires firm evidence before more than one is accepted.
5. The breeding and wintering ranges for each species are given in parentheses at the end of each species account.
6. The following abbreviations have been used in the main text of the report: BO = Bird Observatory, CP = Country Park, GP = Gravel-pit, Resr = Reservoir, SF = Sewage-farm.





**331.** Adult Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*, with Taiga Bean Geese *A. f. fabalis*, Buckenham Marshes RSPB, Norfolk, December 2011.

### **Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* (9, 115, 0)**

Norfolk Buckenham Marshes RSPB, adult, 27th December 2011 to 19th February, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 559 (plate 331).

The post-1950 statistics have decreased by one because the Yorkshire bird in 1996 is now not included. That year's report (*Brit. Birds* 90: 461) noted that the 'Dumfries & Galloway and Gloucestershire birds are probably good, but the Yorkshire one is perhaps a little more doubtful'.

(Rare & declining throughout entire breeding range from N Scandinavia to NE Siberia. Reintroduction scheme in Swedish Lapland boosts numbers wintering in Netherlands. Migratory, wintering Hungary, Black & Caspian Sea areas, N Kazakhstan & lower Yangtze valley, China.)

### **Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

#### **North American races, *B. c. interior/parvipes* (0, 2, 1)**

Argyll Rhunahaorine, Tayinloan, Kintyre, adult, 21st November into 2013, photo (A. McNab, A. Murray, J. S. Nadin *et al.*).

This is just the third record of a vagrant Canada Goose to be accepted in Britain, although several submissions (extending back to 1993) remain under consideration (BOU 2010). The only previous record concerns two birds in North-east Scotland, then Perth & Kinross, from 17th November 1992 to 26th January 1993, when both were shot (*Brit. Birds* 104: 561–562).

The Argyll bird (which may have been present at Rhunahaorine from mid October) accompanied wintering Greenland White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris*, whereas the 1993 birds associated with Greylag Geese *A. anser* of Icelandic origin. Other birds still under review were found in flocks of Pink-footed *A. brachyrhynchus* and Barnacle Geese *B. leucopsis*, two other 'carrier species' that also breed in Greenland. Since the late 1980s, summering and breeding Canada Geese have become increasingly common in west Greenland, where the breeding range overlaps with that of Greenland White-fronts. Competition between these two species has been suggested as a potential contributing factor in the decline of the latter (Mitchell *et al.* 2010, 2011).

Currently, records of presumed vagrant Canada Geese will be published by BBRC as '*interior/parvipes*', since the separation of these forms is difficult. Even though one of the two North-east Scotland birds bore a neck-collar fitted in Maryland, USA, within the core wintering range of *interior* and outside that of *parvipes*, it was accepted only as 'probably subspecies *interior*' (BOU 2010).

Canada Geese that differ in appearance and structure from typical feral birds occasionally join flocks of the latter in Britain and it is unclear what they are, although hybrid Canada × Cackling Goose *B. hutchinsii* has been suspected in some cases. Atypical feral birds may resemble vagrant races of Canada Goose, being smaller and/or darker above and below than the norm. In the absence of conclusive evidence, such as a North American ring or neck-collar, these birds will not be treated by BBRC as potential vagrants and only Canada Geese accompanying wintering Arctic geese are likely to be considered.

(Canada & N USA, introduced W Europe. Race *interior* breeds NE Canada from Hudson Bay E to Baffin Island & NW Greenland. Winters SE USA. Race *parvipes* breeds W Alaska, E to Yukon Territory. Most winter Washington & Oregon, some also NE Texas.)



**Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* (9, 72, 5)**

Argyll Kilchoman, also Loch Gorm and Loch Gruinart, Islay, adult, 21st October into 2013, photo (A. H. J. Harrop *et al.*).

Cumbria Drumbrugh Marsh and Cardurnock, first-winter, 22nd January, photo (D. Robson, N. M. Franklin *et al.*), presumed same Whitrigg Marsh, Anthorn, then Cardurnock, adult, 16th November to 2nd December, photo (C. Auld *et al.*); also seen Dumfries & Galloway.

Devon Exminster and Powderham Marshes RSPB and Topsham, Exe Estuary, first-winter, 5th November 2011 to 18th February, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 559; also seen Hampshire.

Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT, first-winter, 23rd–25th January, photo (M. Youdale *et al.*), presumed same Carsethorn, then Loaningfoot and Southernness Point, 12th February to 1st May, photo (A. Bowman *et al.*), and Loaningfoot and Southernness Point, adult, 26th December into 2013, photo (per birding information services) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 136); also seen Cumbria.

Essex West Mersea, Old Hall Marshes RSPB and Tollesbury Wick, first-winter, 14th November 2011 to 27th March, photo (per birding information services), presumed same Bradwell-on-Sea, Holland Haven and Frinton-on-Sea, 12th–24th February (P. R. Davis, J. Kendall *et al.*).

Hampshire Pennington Marshes, first-winter, 25th–26th February, photo (P. D. Winter *et al.* per Hampshire Recorder), presumed same Needs Ore, 27th February to 24th March, photo (A. R. Howe *et al.* per Hampshire Recorder); also seen Devon. Keyhaven Marshes, adult, 24th October, photo (M. P. Moody), presumed same Farlington Marshes, Portsmouth and Southsea, 25th October into 2013, photo (per birding information services) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plate 47); also seen Kent.

Highland Brora, first-winter, 24th–28th April, photo (S. Holroyd, J. Waters *et al.*).

Kent South Swale, adult, 14th–23rd October, photo (I. E. H. Shepherd *et al.*); also seen Hampshire.

Suffolk Felixstowe Ferry to Kirton Creek, adult, 10th February to 9th March, photo (W. J. Brame *et al.*).

2011 Isle of Wight Freshwater, 12th February, photo (K. Lover); also seen Kent.

2011 Kent Sandwich Bay, 8th February, photo (R. Sutton), presumed same as Hampshire and Sussex 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 559; also seen Isle of Wight.

A fairly typical year, with records at favoured sites in Scotland and along the south coast of England where, in the last decade, there has been a presumed returning bird seen in various places. But the bird in Devon in 2011/12 was clearly a first-winter and it was later seen in Hampshire, which emphasises the value of ageing birds in relation to establishing annual totals and whether birds might be returnees.

BBRC has included the adults in Argyll, Kent/Hampshire and Suffolk as new individuals in the statistics. Keen observers will recognise that this is in contrast to the approach generally taken in the scarce migrants report (e.g. *Brit. Birds* 106: 368–404), where only first-winter wildfowl have been counted as new individuals. This approach has never been followed by BBRC, since wildfowl may abmigrate beyond their native range as adults if they are unpaired.

Dark-bellied Brent Geese *B. b. bernicla* are the most frequent carrier for Red-breasted Geese, and most birds in the Netherlands are first discovered among Brents. Subsequently, Red-breasted Geese often switch to feeding with Barnacle Geese *B. leucopsis*; the preferred grassland feeding areas of the Barnacles is perhaps more to their liking than the saltmarshes often used by Brents.

Although Red-breasted Goose is a popular element of the wildfowl trade, the appearance of family parties on the Dutch Wadden islands indicates that genuinely wild birds are making it to western Europe, while one ringed in the Netherlands, at Nijkerk on 2nd February 1972, was recovered on 9th June 1974 in Russia, on the Yamal Peninsula (van den Berg & Bosman 1999). Complicating the issue further are feral pairs and their offspring in Europe which join up with and travel with flocks of Barnacle Geese. These include breeding pairs in southeast England in 2011 and 2012 (*Bird Atlas 2007–11* in press; ‘Non-native breeding birds in the UK in 2009–11’, *Brit. Birds* in prep.), and an unsuccessful breeding attempt in the Netherlands in 2009. Monitoring of known



feral birds certainly helps BBRC when assessing potentially genuine records, and it is important that details of such birds are submitted to county recorders and the data published.

In January 2013, WWT researchers fitted 11 Red-breasted Geese with satellite tags on their wintering grounds in Bulgaria (see *Brit. Birds* 106: 184). This should help us to learn more about the species' movements and whether a proportion of the wintering population has really vanished or simply moved to undiscovered wintering areas.

(Breeds Taimyr Peninsula, Siberia. Migrates SW to winter coastal regions of W Black Sea in Romania & N Bulgaria. Small numbers regularly winter Netherlands, Greece & Turkey. Some may still use former wintering areas along Caspian Sea.)

### **Black Duck *Anas rubripes* (0, 39, 0)**

Highland Strontian, Loch Sunart, adult male, 23rd December into 2013, photo (R. McMillan, E. Urquhart *et al.*); presumed same as Highland 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 559.

(Breeds E North America from Manitoba to Labrador, Canada, & S to North Carolina, USA. Most are resident or dispersive but N breeders migrate to winter coastal SE USA.)

### **Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* (10, 240, 4)**

Clyde South Gilmourton Pool, male, 1st–15th April, photo (C. Lindsay *et al.*), presumed same Bridgend Farm, 6th–22nd May, 11th August and 16th September, photo (K. Hoey *et al.*) and Carbars Pool, 25th August to 8th September, photo (D. Abraham *et al.*); presumed same as Clyde 2011, see below.

Cornwall Walmsley Sanctuary, female, 18th March to 4th May, photo (per birding information services).

Dorset Longham Lakes, female, 3rd December 2011 to 2nd January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 559–560.

Dumfries & Galloway Threave, adult male, 4th–14th February, presumed same 29th November into 2013 (per Dumfries & Galloway Recorder); presumed same as Dumfries & Galloway 2010, *Brit. Birds* 104: 563.

Isles of Scilly Porth Hellick then Lower Moors, St Mary's, female, 27th November 2011 to 5th March, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 559–560.

Lancashire & North Merseyside Marshside RSPB, adult male, 16th September, photo (N. Hunt *et al.*).

Perth & Kinross Loch Leven, male, 22nd–23rd April, photo (A. S. Wilson *et al.*).

Somerset Ham Wall RSPB, adult male, 11th–16th April, photo (H., M., M. & T. Okon *et al.*).

2011 Clyde Bridgend Farm, male, 10th September, photo (K. Hoey).

2011 Norfolk Holme Marsh, male, 17th April, photo (G. Gamage, G. Hibberd, P. Seymour).

2009 Avon Weston SF, Weston-super-Mare, female, 28th September, photo (P. Bowyer, M. Ponsford).

(Breeds from S Alaska, across much of temperate Canada to SC USA. Migratory, wintering S USA, Mexico, Caribbean & N South America.)

### **Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* (0, 164, 1)**

Avon Chew Valley Lake, adult male, 23rd February, photo (K. E. Vinicombe *et al.*), presumed same 11th–23rd March, photo (C. Stone *et al.*); presumed same as Avon 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 560. Chew Valley Lake, adult male, 28th August to 16th November, photo (K. E. Vinicombe *et al.*), presumed same Blagdon Lake, 7th December into 2013, photo (N. Milbourne *et al.*); also seen East Glamorgan. Chew Valley Lake, adult male, 11th–30th October, photo (R. Higgins, R. Mielcarek *et al.*).

Cornwall Dozmary Pool, adult male, 15th January to 1st February, photo (P. St Pierre per Cornwall Recorder), presumed same Siblyback Resr, 6th–17th February, photo (per birding information services), Newquay, 19th–21st February, photo (S. G. Rowe *et al.*), Siblyback Resr, 5th–15th December (P. Crispin per Cornwall Recorder) and Dozmary Pool, 16th–24th December



(D. Conway per Cornwall Recorder); presumed same as Cornwall 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 560.

**East Glamorgan** Cardiff Bay and Cosmeston Lakes, adult male, 28th December 2011 to 28th April, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 560, presumed same Cardiff Bay, 25th August (P. Bristow *et al.* per East Glamorgan Recorder); also seen Avon.

**Gloucestershire** Slimbridge WWT, adult female, 13th December 2011 to 6th April, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 560.

**Northumberland** Marden Quarry and Tynemouth, female, 5th October 2011 to 23rd January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 560.

**2011 Dumfries & Galloway** Milton Loch, adult male, 22nd–24th March, photo (T. C. Lowe).

**2011 Nottinghamshire** Cuckney Dam, first-winter male, 17th–20th May, photo, note revised dates, *Brit. Birds* 105: 560.

With just a single new arrival, 2012 will go down as a well-below-average year for this species, although five returning or overwintering birds boosted the total number seen. There was a bumper arrival in early 2013, however, with up to 13 individuals discovered by early June (although these records remain to be assessed and some will surely be returnees).

Many submissions of Lesser Scaup cite iris colour as the only character used to determine the age of the bird. Trauger (1974) studied iris colour as an ageing characteristic in the Lesser Scaup and found a great deal of variation, based on a sample of 503 individuals of known age. The ‘eye colour of yearling females ranged from brown to olive yellow’, while that of ‘two-year-old females varied from brown to yellow, but 79% had either brownish yellow or olive yellow eyes’ and ‘12% of two-year-old females had darker eyes typical of yearling females’. Fast *et al.* (2008) assessed Trauger’s work and found that, from a distance, adults were frequently aged as juveniles, yet juveniles were never mistaken for adults. He concluded that Lesser Scaups cannot be aged accurately in the field based on iris colour alone. A more reliable method of ageing this species, in particular for separating first-winter from older birds, is to establish whether juvenile feathers are retained, in particular the narrow and more worn tail feathers and tertials (Pyle 2008).

Identification difficulties with Lesser Scaup were apparent long before the first confirmed record in Britain, in 1987. Male Pochard *A. ferina* × Tufted Duck *A. fuligula* hybrids are now familiar to most birders, while male hybrids including Lesser Scaup parentage are now suspected in some cases. When identifying juvenile Lesser Scaup, the pitfall of juvenile Tufted Duck should not be forgotten.

(Breeds from C Alaska through Canada to Hudson Bay & S to Washington & South Dakota. Isolated populations E of Great Lakes. Winters along both coastlines of USA, in E from New Jersey to Mexico, West Indies, C America to N Colombia.)

### King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* (68, 160, 6)

**Highland** Chanonry Point, Fortrose, adult male, 10th January (K. Davis); also seen Moray & Nairn. Brora, adult male, 24th March, photo (K. M. Samyn).

**Lincolnshire** The Wash, near Wrangle Flats, adult female, 21st April, photo (S. Keightley *et al.*), presumed same Gibraltar Point, 1st–7th July, photo (K. M. Wilson *et al.*).

**Moray & Nairn** Burghead, adult male, 23rd September 2011 to 1st March, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 560–561, presumed same 29th September to 27th December, photo (per birding information services); also seen Highland.

**North-east Scotland** Ythan Estuary, adult male, 27th March to 22nd May, photo (M. Souter *et al.*) (plate 332), presumed same Blackdog and Murcar, 28th May to 1st July, photo (N. Littlewood *et al.*); presumed same as North-east Scotland 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 560–561. Peterhead, adult male, 6th November (M. Innes).

**Outer Hebrides** Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, first-winter female, 1st May, photo (J. B. Kemp *et al.*).

**Shetland** Symbister, Whalsay, second-winter male, 31st December into 2013, photo (J. L. Irvine *et al.*).

**Yorkshire** Filey Brigg, first-winter male, 8th December (J. Sanderson *et al.*).

Two in England in one year is particularly notable as there have been only 24 others since 1950. The female in Lincolnshire was first recorded on a ‘pelagic’ trip into the Wash, when it flew past





**332.** Adult male King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, April 2012.

the boat and was photographed. English records tend to be along North Sea coasts, but there have been eight along the Channel coast or in the southwest since 1950, and one in Cumbria during the same period. So far, there has been just one Welsh record.

The other records in 2012 were, as usual, scattered around Scotland and included a couple of characteristically long-stayers, both assumed to be returnees, and a few

other brief sightings, some of which might also refer to wandering rather than 'new' individuals. New birds do, of course, still turn up, such as the two immatures in the Outer Hebrides and Shetland in 2012, although it was surprising that it took until the last day of the year before one was recorded in Shetland.

(Breeds Kanin Peninsula E across Arctic Siberia, including Novaya Zemlya & W Svalbard, Arctic Alaska, N Canada & N Greenland. European population winters along ice-free coasts of White Sea, N Norway & Iceland. Pacific population winters Bering Sea.)

### **Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* (0, 10, 1)**

North-east Scotland Blackdog and Murcar, first-summer male, 14th June to 6th July, photo (N. A. Littlewood *et al.*).

(Breeds Siberian tundra from Yana River E to Alaska, & N Canada E to Newfoundland. In North Atlantic, winters along coasts of E USA, N to South Carolina, & inland on Great Lakes. Elsewhere, winters ice-free seas along both coasts of N Pacific Ocean, S to N Japan & California.)

### **White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi* (0, 1, 0)**

2011 North-east Scotland Murcar, first-summer male *M. d. deglandi*, 11th–23rd June, photo (P. A. A. Baxter, C. N. Gibbins, H. E. Maggs *et al.*) (plate 333, fig. 1).

The short stretch of coast between Murcar and Blackdog, just north of Aberdeen, holds a fantastic concentration of seaduck between June and August, when thousands of Common Eiders *Somateria mollissima* and scoters gather to moult – an impressive sight in June before they enter eclipse plumage. Regular watching over the years has produced a good number of King Eiders *S. spectabilis* and even more Surf Scoters *M. perspicillata*, with up to six of the latter recorded together. Conditions are not always good; this coastline is best watched in the afternoon, when the light is from behind, and at high tide on a day when the sea is calm. If the conditions are right, anything is possible; if not, it can be very frustrating.

No doubt inspired by the discovery of a White-winged Scoter in Ireland in the winter of 2010/11, three knowledgeable and hard-working local birders settled themselves in for the long haul of 'scoping through the flock' in June 2011. Incredibly, almost the first bird they looked at was an odd-looking 'Velvet' type. However, it bore little resemblance to the flamboyantly profiled



Irish bird (an adult male). Its distinctly stepped head-and-bill profile was at odds with that of the nearby Velvet Scoters *M. fusca*, as was the smaller area of pinkish coloration on the upper mandible. The generally brownish plumage and light belly indicated a first-summer male – but of which taxon? The literature to hand was generally unhelpful but, eventually, enough images were found on the internet to identify the bird with certainty – and the news was out.

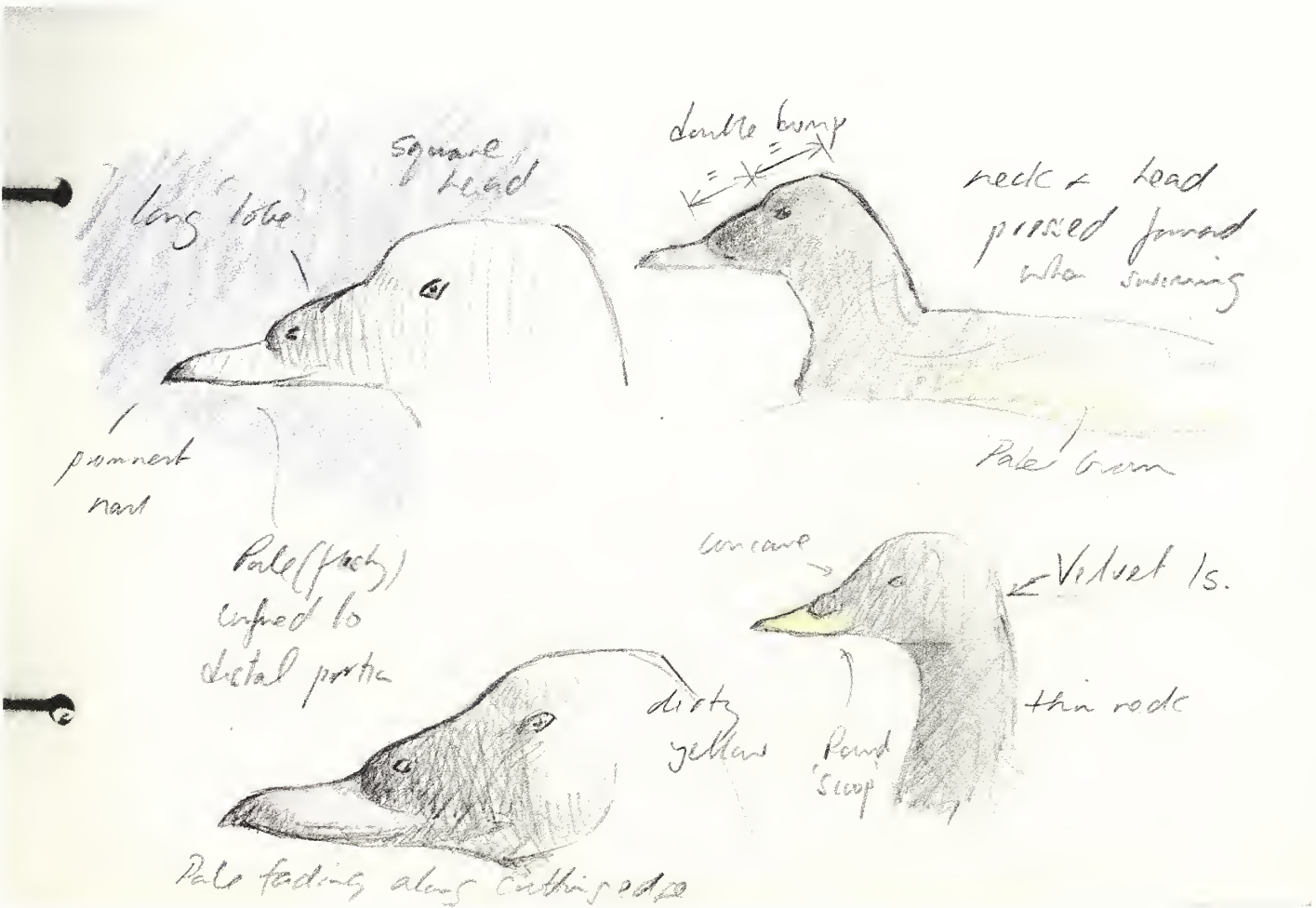


Matthew Deans

333. First-summer male White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*, Murcar, North-east Scotland, June 2011.

Currently there are two recognised races of White-winged Scoter, which itself was lumped with Velvet Scoter until recently. Nominate *M. d. deglandi* occurs in North America, of which the Murcar bird was the first British record, whereas it was the Asian *M. d. stejnegeri* that occurred in Ireland earlier in 2011. So different are the bills of these two that it seems probable they will be treated as separate species at some point in the future, as indeed has been the case in the past. Much credit is due to the finders for their careful scrutiny of this bird, undoubtedly one of the star turns of 2011.

(Race *deglandi* breeds NW Alaska E to Hudson Bay, & S to NE Washington & North Dakota, USA. Winters along Pacific coast from Aleutian Islands to California & Atlantic coast from Gulf of St Lawrence to South Carolina, with some remaining on Great Lakes. Race *stejnegeri* breeds NE Siberia, winters along Pacific coast of NE Asia.)



Chris Gibbins

Fig. 1. First-summer male White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*, Murcar, North-east Scotland, June 2011.



## Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* (1, 14, 1)

Cornwall Housel Bay, Lizard, and Loe Pool, 26th October 2011 to 4th March, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 561; presumed same Drift Resr, 3rd January (D. K. Parker *et al.*).

Lincolnshire Covenham Resr, 27th April, photo (G. P. Langan *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 197).

The overwintering bird in Cornwall was accepted and its age and sex published as juvenile male last year, but we were left questioning the sex when it failed to demonstrate any evidence of male plumage traits before departing, in March. Likewise we have not been confident to age or sex the Lincolnshire bird on current knowledge, but we have included them in the statistics as different birds since we considered that there were differences between the two in the head markings.

(Forested regions of North America from C Alaska throughout W & C Canada to Hudson Bay, S to Montana & NE California. Winters throughout North America, from Aleutian Islands & coastal Alaska S along both seaboard to N Mexico, with small numbers wintering inland.)

## Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus* (0, 5, 2)

Kent Whetsted GP, adult female, 10th February to 6th March, photo (M. J. Lawson, K. Peerless *et al.*).

Sussex Pagham Harbour RSPB, first-winter, 30th October to 17th November, photo (R. & S. Coyne, O. Mitchell, D. Shepherd *et al.*) (plate 334).

Knowing where to draw the line between giving a bird the benefit of the doubt and deciding that its behaviour is just too suspect makes the Hooded Merganser one of the more challenging species to assess. The fact that genuinely wild ducks and geese across the world associate closely with humans and readily accept food means that such behaviour should not necessarily be a reason for finding a bird 'not proven', but it does not make assessment any easier. The infamous Dorset bird, still in residence in 2012, was initially found in a storm drain before relocating to Radipole Lake RSPB, where its behaviour did not help its cause. Had it left after a couple of days, though, it would surely have been given the nod by the Committee. There is no exact science to this, it is simply the opinion of ten people, about how they view each record.

The fact that Hooded Mergansers are commonly kept in captivity in the UK presents a particular problem when judging provenance. Indeed, one Dutch wildfowl collector considers that escapees from English collections may account for some or even all 'wild' birds being seen in the Netherlands!



334. First-winter Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*, Pagham Harbour RSPB, Sussex, November 2012.

The two records in 2012 drew mixed opinions. The timing of both, a first-winter in late autumn and an adult female in the early spring, didn't harm their cause, although relatively few vagrant wildfowl from North America occur in southeast England. In these situations, BBRC tries to maintain a consistent approach, and these birds were given the benefit of the doubt.

(Breeds S Alaska, E across S Canada & N USA to Newfoundland, & S to Oregon, Virginia & locally almost to Gulf coast. Winters coastally, from S limit of breeding range to California & Florida.)



### **Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* (0, 5, 0)**

Cornwall Marazion and Mount's Bay, adult, 5th December into 2013, photo (D. G. Barber, M. T. Elliott, T. Lambert *et al.*); presumed same as Cornwall 2011, see below.

2011 Cornwall Marazion and Newlyn, adult, 21st December 2010 to 3rd March (per Cornwall Recorder); presumed same as Cornwall 2009, *Brit. Birds* 103: 569–571.

We have followed the opinion of local observers that the sightings in winter 2012/13 are likely to be of the same individual recorded in the area in winter 2010/11. Does anyone have documentation to show that it was in the same area during winter of 2011/12?

(Breeds NE Siberia from lower Indigirka river E to Chukotskiy Peninsula, & N North America from Alaska E to Hudson Bay & S Baffin Island. Winters North Pacific Ocean, in Asia S to Japan & E China, & North America S to Baja California & Sonora, Mexico.)

### **'Madeiran Storm-petrel' complex *Oceanodroma castroljabejabe/monteiroi* (0, 2, 0)**

2007 At sea Sea area Sole, 13 km SE of Scilly, 28th July, photo; note now acceptable only to a species group, *Brit. Birds* 104: 567.

2007 Cornwall Pendeen Watch, 16th September; note now acceptable only to a species group, *Brit. Birds* 105: 562–563.

In early 2013, BOURC adopted the recommendation of its Taxonomic Sub-committee that 'Madeiran Storm-petrel' as traditionally recognised comprises at least three population lineages in the Western Palearctic, which are best treated as distinct species (Sangster *et al.* 2012). These are Cape Verde Storm-petrel *O. jabejabe*, which is endemic to the Cape Verde Islands; Madeiran Storm-petrel *O. castro*, a hot-season breeder in Madeira and the Selvagens, but which also provisionally includes cool-season breeders in the Azores, Madeira, the Selvagens, and islands off Portugal; and Monteiro's Storm-petrel *O. monteiroi*, a hot-season breeder in the Azores.

Other than vocalisations given on the breeding territories, there are as yet no reliable means of separating these three cryptic species in the field. Consequently, the two formerly accepted British records of Madeiran Storm-petrel cannot be assigned to species level and are now accepted as belonging to the Madeiran Storm-petrel complex.

(North Atlantic population breeds on islands off coast of Portugal, Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands & Cape Verde group. Elsewhere, breeds Ascension & St Helena, South Atlantic, & Galapagos, Hawaii & islands of N Japan. Distribution outside breeding season poorly understood.)

### **Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (247, 237, 6)**

Hertfordshire Stocker's Lake, Rickmansworth, adult female, 10th–17th June, photo (S. Blake, J. Fearnside, P. Lappert *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 268; plate 335).

Kent Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, female or juvenile, 15th September (M. Coath).

Pembrokeshire Teifi Marshes, first-summer male, 19th–20th April, photo (S. Bebb *et al.*).

Somerset Ham Wall RSPB, male in song, 20th April to 12th July, female, 28th June to 23rd August, photo, and three juveniles, 6th–14th August (R. Summers *et al.*); adults presumed same as Somerset 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 563.

2010 Somerset Ham Wall RSPB, female, 14th–23rd July, photo, note revised dates, *Brit. Birds* 104: 568–569.

1994 Lincolnshire Saltfleetby–Theddlethorpe Dunes, adult male, 11th–13th May (P. M. Troake, J. Walker, K. M. Wilson).

Following the arrival of a territorial male in 2009 and the presence of a pair and a fledged juvenile in 2010, the events in 2012 suggest that the establishment of a breeding population on the Ham Wall RSPB reserve in Somerset may be well underway. The secretive nature of this species, combined with the difficulty of observations in its wet reedbed habitat, make for complications when trying to interpret breeding behaviour. The reported dates and locations suggest that more individuals might have been involved than are published here, with potentially two breeding females successfully hatching young and at least one fledging a brood. However, we have followed





**335.** Adult female Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Stocker's Lake, Hertfordshire, June 2012.

the observers' interpretation that only one adult female was confirmed. Events in spring/summer 2013 further suggest that this species may now be an established breeder at this site, to go along with successful breeding in the county by Great White *Ardea alba* and Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*. These events demonstrate how a successful partnership between a number of conservation organisations to provide high-quality, landscape-scale, wetland habitat can provide ideal conditions for species whose populations are moving northwards in response to a changing climate.

(Widespread but local in Europe N to 53°N. To E, breeds to 60°N in European Russia, & E to Kazakhstan & NW China. Migratory, wintering mainly E Africa, S from Sudan & Ethiopia. Other populations largely resident or dispersive in N Indian subcontinent, sub-Saharan Africa & Australia.)

### **Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (69, 80, 4)**

Avon Chew Valley Lake then Blagdon Lake, adult, 2nd–17th May, photo (A. H. Davis, K. E. Vinicombe *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 227; plate 336).

Kent Dungeness RSPB, adult, 30th May, photo (R. Price, D. Walker *et al.*).

Norfolk Welney WWT, 30th June to 1st July, photo (per birding information services).

Sussex Seaford, adult, 21st June, photo (J. & P. Austen).

(Breeds Mediterranean basin from S Spain to Black Sea & E to Kazakhstan, with large population in Danube Delta. Northern populations migratory, wintering N tropical Africa. African population largely resident.)

### **Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (22, 191, 2)**

Ceredigion Llangeitho, Tregaron, adult, 27th May, photo (L. & M. Tordoff).

Sussex West Burton Hill, 17th July (H. J. & W. J. Capper).

2011 Suffolk Lake Lothing, 4th April (R. Connor, A. C. Easton, R. Murray).

(Breeds C Iberia & E France through C Europe to Russia & small numbers into N Greece & Turkey. To E, breeds widely in forested temperate regions of Russia & Siberia to Russian Far East. Most are migratory, wintering Africa, S & SE Asia.)

### **Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (340, 229, 126)**

Anglesey Valley, then Malltraeth Marsh RSPB, 2nd March into 2013, photo (per Anglesey Recorder).

Ayrshire Dundonald Camp, 5th May, photo (per birding information services).



Bedfordshire Broom GP, 6th March (M. J. Stevens).

Cambridgeshire Ouse Fen RSPB, 19th February (R. D. Thomas *et al.*). Nene Washes RSPB, two, 12th–14th March, photo (C. Kitchin, J. P. Taylor); also seen Surrey. Ouse Washes RSPB, 24th August to 8th October, photo (per birding information services) (plate 337).

Carmarthenshire Penclacwydd, Llanelli WWT, 28th August, photo (E. Boughey, B. Stewart).

Ceredigion Borth, adult, 3rd–21st February, photo (M. Bailey, R. Jones *et al.*).

Cheshire & Wirral Sandbach and Arclid, first-winter, 7th January to 3rd February, photo (B. Perkin, M. Wright *et al.*); presumed same as Cheshire & Wirral 2011, see below.

Cleveland Cowpen Marsh RSPB then Haverton Hole, adult, 8th March to 5th May, ringed, photo (T. Francis *et al.*).

Cornwall Lower Tamar, 20th January, photo (R. C. Horrell, D. E. Paull *et al.*). Windmill Farm, Ruan Major, eight, 6th October, photo (I. Griffiths). Brew, Sennen, three, 7th–21st October, four on 12th–14th, one bird remaining to 23rd, all first-winters, photo (I. Kendall *et al.*).

Cumbria Blackdyke, Arnside, first-winter, 24th January to 26th April, photo (S. J. Dodgson), presumed same Flookburgh, 3rd February, photo (B. Howson); also seen Lancashire & North Merseyside. Campfield Marsh, three, 28th April (N. Holton *et al.*).

Devon Exminster and Powderham Marshes RSPB, adult, 28th December 2011 to 20th January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 565–567; presumed same Dawlish Warren, 4th February (I. Lakin). Thurlestone, 12th January to 16th February, photo (per birding information services). Crediton, two, 17th January (A. Goodwin, H. Woodland). Exminster and Powderham Marshes RSPB then Dawlish Warren, 21st May to 4th June (J. R. Diamond, B. B. Heasman *et al.*). Aveton Gifford, 19th October (A. Bicknell, S. C. Votier).

Dorset Lodmoor RSPB and Radipole RSPB, two, 3rd February to 3rd May, photo (G. Barlow *et al.*). Canford Bridge, Wimborne, 12th February (R. H. Peart), presumed same Wareham, 12th–26th February, ringed, photo (N. Gartshore). Stanpit Marsh, Christchurch, 4th–5th May (O. Frampton); also seen Hampshire (Lower Pennington). Longham Lakes, 2nd December (N. J. Hull, S. P. Piggott *et al.*); also seen Hampshire (Bickerley Common).

Essex Chigborough Lakes then Great Baddow, adult, 7th March to 13th April, photo (per birding information services). Frinton-on-Sea, 1st April (P. Brayshaw).

Greater London Crayford Marshes, 14th October (J. Hunter, B. E. Wright); also seen Greater London/Essex.



Gary Thoburn

**336.** Adult Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, Chew Valley Lake, Avon, May 2012.



- Greater London/Essex Rainham Marshes RSPB, 14th–15th October, photo (per Greater London Recorder); also seen Greater London.
- Gwent Newport Wetlands RSPB, 14th–18th January, then two, both adults, on 19th–31st January, photo (C. C. Mendez *et al.*).
- Hampshire Hook-with-Warsash, 11th February, photo (J. Faithfull, W. Fisher). Sturt Pond, Milford-on-Sea, first-winter, 7th April, photo (A. R. Collins). Needs Ore, 7th–8th April, photo (N. R. & S. Jones *et al.*). Lower Pennington, 4th–5th May (M. P. Moody, S. P. Piggott *et al.*); also seen Dorset (Stanpit Marsh). Pennington Marshes, 27th May to 2nd June, photo (M. P. Moody *et al.*). Farlington Marshes, adult, 28th May to 15th June, photo (T. M. J. Doran *et al.*). Keyhaven Marshes, 23rd–24th October, photo (M. P. Moody *et al.*). Bickerley Common, 2nd December into 2013, photo (S. P. Piggott *et al.*); also seen Dorset (Longham Lakes).
- Highland Cleadale, Isle of Eigg, two, 16th–19th January, then five on 20th–22nd, six on 23rd–26th and seven on 27th January, photo (A. Boden, J. Chester, M. MacKinnon).
- Isle of Wight Brading Marshes RSPB, 8th–16th April, photo (J. Gloyn *et al.*).
- Isles of Scilly Tresco Channel, Lower Moors and other sites, St Mary's, 27th December 2011 to 5th January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 565–567. Hugh Town, St Mary's, then Simpson's Field and Abbey Pool, Tresco, 27th April (P. A. Dukes, G. K. Gordon *et al.*).
- Kent Stodmarsh, two, first-winters, 27th October 2011 to 17th February, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 565–567. Dungeness RSPB, 14th February, photo (P. Trodd *et al.*).
- Lancashire & North Merseyside Leighton Moss RSPB and elsewhere, first-winter, 13th December 2011 to 10th May, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 565–567; also seen Cumbria. Aldcliffe Marsh, 7th–12th January (D. Haywood, M. Lynch *et al.*). Hesketh Out Marsh RSPB, 2nd September (G. Thomas).
- Lincolnshire Saltfleet Haven, three, 9th–10th March, photo (S. Lorand *et al.*). Nettleton, Caistor, 17th March, photo (D. M. Langston).
- Montgomeryshire Montgomery, 24th February to 30th April, photo (per birding information services).
- Norfolk Berney Marshes RSPB, Halvergate, Burgh Castle and Cantley Marshes, five, 23rd February to 27th March (P. R. Allard, R. Fairhead *et al.*).
- Outer Hebrides Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, 23rd March to 26th April, photo (B. Rabbitts *et al.*).
- Pembrokeshire Neyland, two, 12th January (A. Hansen), presumed same St David's Head, 13th January to 1st February, photo (M. Young-Powell *et al.*). Sageston, 14th January, photo (M. Arnold per Pembrokeshire Recorder). Marloes Mere, three, 18th January to 12th May, then four on 13th May to 9th June, one from 10th June into 2013, photo (M. Howe *et al.* per Pembrokeshire Recorder) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 98). Carew, 23, 28th January to 14th February, photo (R. Ellis *et al.*). Walwyn's Castle, 28th–31st January, photo (D. & L. Bowen, P. Lewis).
- Shropshire Whixall Moss, 5th May, photo (P. Boardman, G. Risdon *et al.*).
- Somerset Meare Heath, 11th May, photo (J. R. Best, R. L. Musgrove *et al.*). Catcott Lows, 12th May (A. Ashman, B. Gibbs *et al.*). Stockland Reach and Combwich, two, 9th–11th June, photo (S. C. Fairweather, R. L. Musgrove *et al.*). Stockland Reach, 26th August (J. R. & R. E. Best *et al.*). Ham Wall RSPB, 29th October to 30th November, photo (J. A. Hazell *et al.*).
- Suffolk Eastbridge and Minsmere RSPB, 23rd February to 13th April, photo (M. Muttitt *et al.* per Suffolk Recorder). North Warren, Minsmere RSPB and Southwold, two, 29th May to 14th June, one from 15th June to 16th July, photo (D. Fairhurst, J. Mountain, D. Thurlow *et al.*), presumed same Minsmere RSPB, 13th August (I. Salkeld per Suffolk Recorder).
- Surrey Queen Elizabeth II Resr, two, 14th March, photo (D. M. Harris *et al.*); also seen Cambridgeshire.
- Sussex Barnham, 11th February to 1st April, photo (A. Lillywhite). Cuckmere Haven, 13th February, photo (M. R. Eade). Pagham Harbour RSPB, two, 6th May to 26th August, photo (M. D. Shaw, J. D. Weston *et al.*). Rodmell Brooks, 21st–24th May, photo (S. Munday *et al.*). Horse Eye Level, 23rd May (T. P. Fox). Pannel Valley, Icklesham, 23rd–26th May, photo (I. Hunter, D. Owers *et al.*).
- Wiltshire Stonehenge, seven, 5th October (A. M. & R. Turner).



Yorkshire North Cave Wetlands, 3rd February (G. A. Dayes).

2011 Berkshire Lea Farm GP, 7th May, photo (per birding information services), presumed same as Essex and other counties 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 565–567.

2011 Cheshire & Wirral/Flintshire Burton Mere Wetlands RSPB, first-winter, 12th–14th November, photo (P. Brady, K. Smith *et al.*).

2011 Hampshire Lymington, 17th October (E. J. Wiseman).

2011 Kent Yalding, 25th April (K. Derrett).

2010 Herefordshire Hereford Quarry, Hagley, 27th September to 4th October, photo (A. H. Eveleigh *et al.*).

[Note: the 2010 record is presumed to be from the original influx in that year and has not been added to the statistics.]

Glossy Ibis was dropped from the list of species considered by BBRC from 1st January 2013 (see *Brit. Birds* 106: 51–52) following the arrival of at least 126 birds in 2012. As recently as 2007, the total for the entire BBRC era was below this figure and it doesn't seem too long ago that this species was a major rarity. The first truly twitchable bird of the BBRC era spent a month at Swanscombe Marsh, Kent, in April and May 1974. Although it was the third in three years, it was also just the 12th since 1950. For those who missed that individual, another arrived in Kent in December 1975, although it wasn't pinned down until early 1976 when it took up residence at Stodmarsh. In fact, a further three were recorded in 1976, an event which the BBRC report for that year described as 'astonishing'. But that Stodmarsh bird remained, with occasional excursions to the North Kent Marshes or to the Grove/Preston area, and many of today's veteran twitchers will have cut their teeth on this long-staying individual during the 1970s and 1980s. In October 1979 it was joined by a second bird; so unlikely was this that the BBRC report for 1980 commented that: 'It now seems most unlikely that these are of wild origin, but for many the annual pilgrimage to Stodmarsh is still worthwhile'. The two in Kent remained together until 1985 and one stayed the course until the end of 1992.

By 1993 (the first year without a Glossy Ibis somewhere in Britain since 1971), the BBRC-era total had reached 57, including an influx of 18 in 1986, spread from Cornwall to Orkney and including a party of two adults and three juveniles in Cornwall in October, perhaps an inkling that the status of this species was changing.

In the 1970s, the Glossy Ibis bred no closer than the Balkans, having become extinct in the Iberian Peninsula at the beginning of the twentieth century. Breeding occurred in Italy and Sardinia during the 1980s and was followed a decade later by



Simon Knight

**337.** Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Ouse Washes RSPB, Cambridgeshire, August 2012.



re-establishment of breeding colonies in the Doñana National Park in southwest Spain, and the Ebro Delta in northeast Spain in 1996. The Doñana colony increased rapidly to become the largest in western Europe, holding more than 3,500 pairs in 2007 and about 5,300 pairs in 2010 (Toral *et al.* 2012), although there was no breeding there in 1999 and 2005 owing to severe droughts (Santoro *et al.* 2010). Expansion into the Camargue in southern France began in 2006, where the population has also increased rapidly. Some 7,000 pairs nested in Doñana in 2011 but another drought in 2012 resulted in just a few colonies remaining, the largest of which held no more than 30 pairs (Ausden *et al.* 2013). These periodic droughts trigger dispersal from breeding colonies and may be responsible for the recent influxes in Britain, although not all coincide with drought years. Perhaps the earlier droughts have established a regular post-breeding dispersal to the northwest, and these annual influxes are now something we can continue to look forward to.

(Breeds S France & Spain; otherwise, European breeding range centred N & W of Black Sea in Ukraine & Romania, with small, declining population in Balkans. To E, breeds from Volga River to Kazakhstan. Migratory, most wintering E Africa, but W European population winters Morocco & Mediterranean basin. Resident or dispersive populations occur Africa, S Asia, Australia, E USA & the Caribbean to N South America.)

### **Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* (0, 39, 1)**

Outer Hebrides Loch Smerclate and Loch na Bagh, South Uist, 26th November to 8th December, photo (J. B. Kemp *et al.*).

(Breeds throughout North America from C Canada S through USA to C America, the Caribbean & much of South America. Northern populations migratory, wintering S USA & Mexico.)

### **Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (2, 56, 4)**

Gloucestershire Frampton WWT, adult male, 3rd April, photo (J. Lees, M. McGill).

Norfolk Cley Marshes, Blakeney Point and Stiffkey, first-summer male, 5th May, photo (J. Cockram, P. Nichols *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plates 199, 284).

Yorkshire Spurn then Patrington Oustray, first-summer, 6th–14th May, photo (J. Ashton-Booth, A. Hutt, J. M. Turton *et al.*). Firsby Reservoirs, Ravenfield, female, 23rd September to 7th October, photo (A. Deighton, P. Leonard, C. Tyler *et al.*).

Following a report of a ringtail Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus* at Firsby Reservoirs by Des Warburton on 10th September, Paul Leonard visited the site on 23rd and saw what he assumed was the same bird, which he also considered to be a Hen Harrier, albeit with some reservations. On 29th September, Andy Deighton saw images taken of the bird by Chris Tyler and realised that the number of primary ‘fingers’ indicated that this was no Hen Harrier. It was Dani López-Velasco who first suggested the correct diagnosis after viewing images on the internet, and this is the first adult female Pallid Harrier to be recorded in Britain. Fortunately, the bird remained faithful to its roost site over the following days, allowing good numbers of observers the opportunity to gain field experience of the species in this plumage, which is the most difficult in terms of identification.

(Breeds from Ukraine E through Russia to c. 100°E, & S to Kazakhstan & NW China. Occasionally breeds Finland. Migratory, wintering throughout much of E & C Africa, & Indian subcontinent.)

### **Eleonora’s Falcon *Falco eleonora* (0, 6, 1)**

Cornwall Porthgwarra, first-summer dark-morph, 11th August, photo (J. H. Irvine, D. A. Rogers) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plate 293).

This enigmatic Mediterranean falcon has yet to be successfully twitched in Britain, even though this is the seventh record. Arriving late on the breeding grounds, having wintered in southeast Africa and Madagascar, immatures and non-breeders wander within the Mediterranean and occasionally venture into northern and western Europe in late summer and autumn. Never (yet) lingering, this remains among the hardest of species to get accepted by any rarities committee. While it may be hard to convey the subtle characteristics of a dark falcon in words, the huge increase in birders carrying digital cameras will surely lead to a growing number of accepted



records, especially as some populations in the western Mediterranean are increasing.

At Porthgwarra the finders should be congratulated both for recognising that the falcon they were watching hawking insects over the sea cliffs was not a Hobby *F. subbuteo* and for photographing the bird well enough to identify it as a first-summer dark-morph (a series of photographs that merited third place in the 2013 Carl Zeiss Award, *Brit. Birds* 106: 477–480).

(Breeds from Canary Islands & coastal Morocco E through Mediterranean basin to Cyprus. Many colonies small & restricted to offshore islands. Most numerous Aegean Sea, but increasing Balearics. Migrates through E Africa to winter S to coastal Mozambique & Madagascar.)

## Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* (222, 169, 4)

Outer Hebrides Bornish, South Uist, immature white-morph, 18th November, photo (A. Stevenson per Outer Hebrides Recorder); presumed same Eoligarry, Barra, white-morph, 1st December, found dead, photo (G. McCracken, E. Mitchell). Balranald, North Uist, immature white-morph, 1st December into 2013, photo (B. Rabbitts, S. Taylor *et al.*); presumed same Ardivachar, South Uist, 3rd December (C. & C. Johnson per Outer Hebrides Recorder). Balranald and Loch Paible, North Uist, immature white-morph, 11th December, photo (S. E. Duffield, J. B. Kemp, B. Rabbitts *et al.*). Kilpheder and Orasay, South Uist, immature white-morph, 17th–18th December, photo (J. B. Kemp).

At first glance it appears that there was a small influx of Gyr Falcons in the far northwest in winter 2012/13, and we have accepted four separate individuals in November–December 2012 in the Outer Hebrides. But with such a mobile and wide-ranging species, one that is hard to pin down and see well, establishing the number of birds involved is difficult. In addition to the sightings published above, there were dates when birds were seen poorly, which are not published here. Overall, we have made a conservative attempt to estimate the numbers by linking separate sightings where it seemed appropriate, although some voters still felt that some perceived plumage differences could be explained by viewing conditions and also changes in a bird's appearance over time, for example through plumage wear, soiling, etc. In particular, the bird at Ardivachar could be the same as the one seen at Balranald and Loch Paible. No matter how many were present, those observers lucky enough to see this magnificent falcon in such a remote setting are widely envied.

(In Europe, most numerous Iceland & Norway, smaller populations breeding N Sweden, Finland & Arctic Russia. To E, breeds Arctic Siberia, Alaska, N Canada & Greenland. European birds mostly resident but high-Arctic breeders from N Canada & Greenland migratory, occasionally wintering S to NW Europe.)

## Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* (65, 16, 7)

Anglesey Malltreath RSPB, birds recorded from 22nd May to 14th July, initially one increasing to at least four from 19th June, possibly up to five or six, in song, sound recording, photo (I. Hawkins *et al.*).

Cambridgeshire Nene Washes RSPB, in song, 7th–19th June, sound recording (K. Piercy, J. P. Taylor *et al.*).

Ceredigion Ynys-hir RSPB, in song, 25th–28th June, sound recording (R. Jones).

Greater London/Essex Rainham Marshes RSPB, juvenile, 7th–23rd September, photo (M. Taylor *et al.* per Greater London/Essex Recorders) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 396; plate 338).

One of the most unexpected ornithological events of 2012 was the discovery of several singing Baillon's Crakes at a number of sites in England and Wales during the national Spotted Crake *P. porzana* survey (Ausden *et al.* 2013). Such events do not come without issues for BBRC. How do we assess birds that are heard only? Are sound recordings essential? What if not all birds are sound-recorded? In 2012 multiple birds were heard at some sites, sometimes briefly or distantly, and details of these were not submitted. The numbers accepted here should be seen as the minimum present; the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) report for 2012 may expand on the situation regarding those birds heard but not sound-recorded. Identification based on plumage is relatively straightforward, and sexing should also be possible with a good view, but what about vocalisations?





**338.** Juvenile Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Rainham Marshes RSPB, Greater London/Essex, September 2012.

singing Baillon's due to the sheer volume of noise produced! This is less of a problem in Britain, but potential confusion risks include drake Garganey *Anas querquedula* (Ruud van Beusekom *in litt.*).

The calls of Baillon's Crake are distinctive when known, but the male and female are believed to have a different 'rattle call'. Arnoud van den Berg (*in litt.*) has commented that males and females quickly stop singing once they are paired. Sometimes, when several Baillon's occur together, most will find a partner quickly but unmated birds keep singing and, understandably, these are likely to be of the same gender. At De Onlanden, in the Netherlands, where as many as 35 territories were reported in 2012, males were heard in a brief period in the first days after their arrival, but many females continued to sing rather late into the spring, suggesting a surfeit of this sex. A similar situation may have occurred in Britain, and it is hoped that the RBBP report for 2012 can clarify events further.

Examples of various Baillon's Crake calls can be heard by following the link on the BBRC website, and we are most grateful to the Sound Approach team for making these recordings available.

(Locally common breeder from Spain E through Mediterranean Basin to Ukraine, occasionally N to Netherlands. To E breeds warm temperate Asia E to Japan. European breeders migrate throughout S Europe to winter sub-Saharan Africa. Elsewhere, winters Indian subcontinent & SE Asia to Singapore. Other races breed Australasia & southern Africa.)

### **Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica* (0, 3, 0)**

2011 Devon Horndon, Mary Tavy, first-winter, 24th January, found dead, photo, note revised location, *Brit. Birds* 105: 572.

(Breeds USA from South Carolina to Texas, S through C America & Caribbean to N Argentina. Northern populations migratory, wintering to S of breeding range.)

### **Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis* (0, 4, 0)**

2011 Yorkshire Whitby, adult, 29th September (H. M. & R. Adams; P. J. Hindley per Yorkshire Recorder), presumed same as Cleveland and other counties 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 572–574.

In last year's report we said that 'for a single bird to increase the total of so many county lists is surely unprecedented', having received descriptions from six counties. That now increases to seven, with a submission from Yorkshire, but we still have nothing from Lincolnshire.

(Breeds NE Siberia & North America from Alaska E to Baffin Island, S to NE California to Michigan, & SE USA from S Mississippi to Florida, also Cuba. Northern breeders winter C & SW USA to NW & C Mexico. SE USA breeders resident.)



## Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (134, 271, 30)

Avon Chew Valley Lake, adult male, 10th April, photo (R. Palmer *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 162; plate 339); also seen Dorset.

Cambridgeshire Little Paxton GP, 3rd–24th May, photo (M. R. Davis); presumed same Ouse Fen RSPB, adult, probably male, 9th–25th May, photo (R. D. Thomas *et al.*). Ouse Fen RSPB, two, adults, male and female, 8th May, photo (R. Whelan *et al.*); also seen Suffolk.

Cumbria Hodbarrow RSPB, female, 28th May (S. Davis, N. Holton, E. Morgan *et al.*); also seen Co. Durham, Yorkshire.

Devon Exminster and Powderham Marshes RSPB and Bowling Green Marsh RSPB, three, adult/second-winter, 25th–27th April, photo (J. Waldon *et al.*), presumed same, 5th May and 27th–29th May (J. R. Diamond *et al.* per Devon Recorder), with a fourth at Exminster and Powderham Marshes RSPB on 5th May (J. R. Diamond, L. Lock *et al.*) and a fifth individual at that site on 27th May (J. R. Diamond). Wrafton, two, adult/second-winter, 28th April to 1st May, photo (J. Turner *et al.* per Devon Recorder).

Dorset Radipole Lake RSPB then Abbotsbury, adult male, 11th–18th April, photo (RSPB staff, S. A. Groves *et al.*); also seen Avon. Abbotsbury, 24th–27th May, photo (S. A. Groves *et al.*). Radipole Lake RSPB and Lodmoor RSPB, 24th–25th May, photo (D. Croxson, J. & N. Hull *et al.*).

Co. Durham Shibdon Pond, female, 29th May, photo (per Durham Recorder); also seen Cumbria, Yorkshire.

Gwent Newport Wetlands RSPB, 25th May, photo (per Gwent Recorder).

Hampshire Pennington Marshes, two, pair, 27th May to 9th June, photo (R. J. Hayward *et al.*); also seen Sussex.

Kent Elmley Marshes RSPB, four (two pairs), 5th May, then two, 6th–11th May, photo (per Kent Recorder).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Leighton Moss RSPB, two, adults, 20th April, photo (per Lancashire & N Merseyside Recorder); also seen Norfolk, West Midlands.

Leicestershire & Rutland Rutland Water, adult female, 13th April, photo (S. M. Lister, J. Neal *et al.*); also seen Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire.

Lincolnshire Willow Tree Fen and Frampton Marsh RSPB, adult female, 14th April to 18th May, photo (B. Willcox *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 200); also seen Leicestershire & Rutland, Oxfordshire. Saltfleetby–Theddlethorpe Dunes, adult, 13th October (A. Ashley, A. & R. Lowe *et al.*).

Norfolk Upton Marshes, two, adults, 24th–30th April (H. & N. Robson *et al.*); also seen Lancashire & North Merseyside, West Midlands. Cley Marshes, female, 6th–18th June, photo (per birding information services).

Oxfordshire Standlake, 12th April, adult female, photo (per birding information services); also seen Leicestershire & Rutland, Lincolnshire.

Somerset Ham Wall RSPB, female, 29th May, photo (M. Harris *et al.*). Curry Moor, three, pair and one female, 2nd–9th June, photo (R. L. Musgrove *et al.*).

Suffolk Minsmere RSPB, two, pair, 7th May, photo (D. Fairhurst *et al.*); also seen Cambridgeshire.

Sussex Bracklesham Bay RSPB, two, adult male and female, 1st June (G. A. Heath); also seen Hampshire.

West Midlands Clayhanger, two, adults, 19th April, photo (K. M. Clements, C. Mason); also seen Lancashire & North Merseyside, Norfolk.

Yorkshire Fairburn Ings RSPB, female, 30th–31st May, photo (B. Blackburn *et al.*); also seen Cumbria, Co. Durham.

The 30 records in 2012 constitute the second-best year for Black-winged Stilts in Britain, bettered only by 33 in 1987. A similar influx reached the Netherlands, where around 60 were found in April and May (*Dutch Birding* 34: 195–209), suggesting widespread dispersal to the north of the regular breeding range at this time. The reasons for this influx may lie in the drought that gripped southern Spain in 2012, and which may also have been responsible for the record numbers of Glossy Ibises in Britain, later in the year (see pp. 583–586).

Being distinctive and conspicuous waders, Black-winged Stilts are relatively straightforward to





**339.** Adult male Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Chew Valley Lake, Avon, April 2012.

track as they move between well-watched wetland sites, often in pairs or small parties. This is reflected in the accepted records for 2012, where birds moved overnight and were relocated the following day: Avon to Dorset; Suffolk to Cambridgeshire; Cumbria to Durham and then on to Yorkshire; West Midlands to Lancashire & North Merseyside and then on to Norfolk; Oxfordshire to Leicestershire & Rutland and on to Lincolnshire, while a pair in Hampshire made a brief visit to neighbouring Sussex but quickly returned. Without the detailed information and photographs that enabled the Committee to follow these particular individuals, it is possible that the previous high of 33 would have been exceeded. Conversely, the total of 33 in 1987 might have been lower if digital cameras had been widely available then.

Despite the fact that so many birds, including several pairs, found apparently suitable breeding habitat in southern and eastern England, only one pair attempted to breed (at Curry Moor, in Somerset, although the nest was washed out within a week of discovery; *Brit. Birds* 105: 492). Black-winged Stilts breed in good numbers as near as the Somme Estuary in northern France, but they have yet to establish a beachhead here.

Almost all of the birds in 2012 were in spring, with arrival dates between 10th April and the end of May, although most occurred from the last week in April onwards. As expected, the southern and eastern coastal counties from Lincolnshire to Devon and Somerset received the lion's share, and just one bird reached a landlocked county, arriving at Standlake in Oxfordshire before moving on to Rutland Water and then to Frampton. Two birds made it into northern England, and one just reached south Wales, where it graced the Goldcliff Lagoons wader hotspot for a day.

(Breeds along Atlantic coast of France & locally throughout Mediterranean basin to Black Sea. To E, breeds from S Siberia & C Asia to NW China & S to Hong Kong. Most European birds winter sub-Saharan Africa &, increasingly, in SW Iberia. Asian breeders winter S & SE Asia & S China.)

### **Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (2, 75, 2)**

Norfolk Cley Marshes, 22nd–27th June, photo (per birding information services) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 269).

Wiltshire Winterbourne Downs RSPB, (adult) male, 22nd–23rd June, photo (K. Spate).

(Breeds across Siberian tundra from Yamal Peninsula E to Chukotskiy Peninsula, including New Siberian islands, & W Alaska. Winters Indian subcontinent, S China & S Japan, S through SE Asia to Australia, New Zealand & islands in C Pacific, small numbers regular Kenya & Persian Gulf.)



**Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* (0, 2, 1)**

Outer Hebrides South Glendale, South Uist, juvenile, 7th–11th September, photo (J. B. Kemp *et al.*) (plates 340 & 341).



Steve Duffield

**340 & 341.** Juvenile Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*, South Glendale, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, September 2012.

Tempting though it is to suggest that Semipalmated Plover might be overlooked as a vagrant in Britain, the relevant field characters are well documented and the species has been on the rare-bird radar for a good few years now. Birders know well enough to check suspicious-looking juveniles for the tell-tale nib of white feathering protruding above the gape, while other features supporting the identification of this subtle plover include a stubby bill that appears uptilted at the tip, a shallow breast-band and pale-fringed wing-coverts. Of course, hearing the call will also help, but the appropriate partial toe-webbing still needs to be seen to clinch an identification, and good photographs will prove the record. Nonetheless, it seems that Semipalmated Plover is a genuinely rare visitor.

The Hebridean bird is a Scottish first, but the third to be identified in Britain, following a juvenile on St Agnes, Scilly, from 9th October until 9th November 1978, and a first-summer at Dawlish Warren, Devon, which summered in 1997 before returning there as an adult the following spring. Ireland boasts only two records (single juveniles on Aranmore Island, Co. Donegal, on 10th–11th October 2003, and at Ventry Harbour, Co. Kerry, from 24th September until 15th October 2011), and this further cements the notion that this Nearctic plover is truly rare in Europe.

If encountering an adult, extra field points to check include the precise pattern of black and white on the face (on Semipalmated, the black on the lores is narrow, the white on the forehead does not extend to a point below the eye, and the pale supercilium is reduced) and the presence of a clear yellow orbital ring, albeit narrower and less conspicuous than that of Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius*. Birders familiar with the nominate race of Ringed Plover *C. h. hiaticula* may be thrown by an encounter with the northern *C. h. tundrae* as they pass through on migration, since this Arctic-breeding race is far smaller and swarthier than our local breeders, and can look surprisingly different; a careful check of the relevant suite of identification characters, however, will soon settle the matter. Semipalmated Plover does remain very much a finder's bird, a species well worth looking for and a rewarding prize for anyone willing to invest the effort.

(Breeds Alaska & across N Canada to Baffin Island & Newfoundland. Winters from Atlantic & Pacific shores of southern USA to S South America.)

**Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* (0, 15, 1)**

Outer Hebrides Stinky Bay, Benbecula, female, 8th–9th June, photo (S. E. Duffield *et al.*) (plate 342).

This (typically) midsummer record is the sixteenth British sighting of a species that remains truly rare. The first, in 1978, was the first of six in five years but, after two in 1988, the last seven have been



Steve Duffield



**342.** Female Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Stinky Bay, Benbecula, Outer Hebrides, June 2012.

almost neck and neck: four records of Greater compared with three of Lesser (although the well-photographed and obvious *mongolus* in Moray in July 2013 is set to make it four all).

There is still much to be discovered about the Greater Sand Plover complex and exactly where British birds originate. There are three races of Greater Sand Plover: nominate *leschenaultii*, *crassirostris* and *columbinus*, and all seem credible vagrants. Although most British records of birds in breeding plumage appear to resemble *crassirostris*, there is plenty of scope to develop identification criteria since none has yet been assigned to a particular subspecies.

(Race *columbinus* breeds locally C Turkey, Jordan & perhaps Armenia. Other races breed from E Caspian Sea across C Asia to Mongolia & NW China. Winters along tropical coasts of E Africa, Persian Gulf, Indian subcontinent, SE Asia & Australia.)

### Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* (4, 27, 1)

Orkney Swartmill Loch, Westray, adult, 20th–23rd July, photo (A. Forsyth, D. Otter *et al.*).

(Breeds Siberian tundra from Yana River to Kolyma River delta, possibly further E. Migrant through coastal Alaska, China & Japan to winter New Guinea, Australia & New Zealand.)

### Broad-billed Sandpiper *Calidris falcinellus* (15, 224, 3)

Cleveland Seaton Snook, juvenile, 21st–22nd August, photo (G. Joynt *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Loch Bee, South Uist, adult/first-summer, 28th May, photo (S. E. Duffield).

Yorkshire Nosterfield, adult, 25th August (S. Worwood).

(Nominate race breeds N Norway, Sweden & Finland, & Arctic Russia where distribution uncertain. Migrates through E Mediterranean, Black & Caspian Seas to winter Persian Gulf & W India to Sri Lanka, with small numbers coastal E Africa. E race *sibirica* breeds from Taimyr Peninsula E to Kolyma River delta, & winters from Bay of Bengal through coastal SE Asia to Australia.)

Gary Woodburn



**343.** Adult Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*, Northumberland, August 2012.

spread over a quarter century. Scotland has enjoyed most of the recent records and this year's individual fits in with a developing trend of a brief stay at a remote location.

Although Greater Sand Plover is generally perceived as occurring more frequently than the much rarer Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus* (of which there are just five records: two of the *atrifrons* group and three of the *mongolus* group), this has not been the case since 2000, when the two have been

### Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* (0, 29, 1)

Northumberland Low Newton-by-the-Sea, adult, 5th–9th August, photo (G. Woodburn *et al.*) (plate 343).

(Breeds North America from NE Alaska to Hudson Bay, Canada. Migrates through interior & E USA to winter C South America from E Bolivia & S Brazil to NE Argentina. Occasionally winters N to Mexico, Caribbean & S USA.)



### Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* (1, 237, 10)

Cleveland Seaton Snook and Newburn, juvenile, 3rd–18th September, photo (T. Francis, G. Joynt, R. Scott *et al.*).

Cornwall Marazion, adult, 31st August, photo (M. T. Elliott *et al.* per J. Packer).

Hampshire Pennington Marshes, juvenile, 14th September, photo (A. W. Olden).

Isles of Scilly South Beach, Tresco, then Teän, juvenile, 16th September, photo (J. Rose, W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*).

Norfolk Titchwell Marsh RSPB, juvenile, 10th–11th September, photo (N. M. Lawton *et al.*).

Titchwell Marsh RSPB, juvenile, 19th–24th September, photo (per birding information services).

Northumberland Brownsman, Farne Islands, adult, 25th–26th September, photo (C. R. Hatsell, D. Kinchin-Smith, D. Steel).

Orkney Palace, Birsay, juvenile, 8th September, sound recording, photo (A., E. & M. Forsyth).

Outer Hebrides Northton, Harris, juvenile, 19th October, photo (S. J. Dodgson).

Pembrokeshire West Angle Beach, juvenile, 20th–25th August, photo (C. Hurford *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 397).

2011 Outer Hebrides Balgarva, South Uist, juvenile, 4th–17th October, photo, note revised dates, *Brit. Birds* 105: 580.

(Breeds extreme NE Siberia on Chukotskiy Peninsula & Wrangel Island, E across N Alaska & Arctic Canada to N Baffin Island & NW Greenland. Migrates through North American interior to winter South American Andes, from S Ecuador to Tierra del Fuego.)

### Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* (0, 8, 0)

Norfolk Cley Marshes and Blakeney Harbour, first-winter, 28th November 2011 to 31st January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 578 (*Brit. Birds* 105: plates 72, 261, 331).

(Breeds Chukotskiy Peninsula, NE Siberia, & coastal tundra of W & N Alaska. Migrates through North America to winter coastal California, Gulf of Mexico & Atlantic coast N to North Carolina, & S to C America, Venezuela & Peru.)

### Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* (0, 116, 7)

Argyll Gott Bay, Tiree, juvenile, 2nd–7th September, photo (K. Gillon *et al.*).

Ceredigion Dyfi Estuary, Ynys-hir RSPB and Ynyslas, juvenile, 20th–22nd September, photo (A. C. Lees *et al.*).

Highland Broadford Bay, Skye, juvenile, 7th–11th September, photo (M. Benson *et al.*).

Kent Dungeness, juvenile, 9th–17th September, photo (per birding information services).

Lothian Tynninghame Bay, adult, 29th–31st July, photo (K. Gillon, C. D. Scott *et al.*). Tynninghame Bay, juvenile, 13th–20th September, photo (K. Gillon, M. Griffin, C. D. Scott *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, juvenile, 3rd–4th September, photo (B. A. E. Marr).

2011 Cornwall Drift Resr, juvenile, 12th–18th September, photo (P. Hines, M. Wallace *et al.*), note revised dates and observers, *Brit. Birds* 105: 576–578.

2007 Cornwall Carnsew Pool, Hayle, adult, 22nd August, photo (N. L. Bond, S. Gibson, G. Maddison *et al.*).

(Breeds on tundra of W Alaska, E across Arctic Canada to S Baffin Island & coastal Labrador. Has bred extreme NE Siberia. Migrates across Great Plains & E seaboard of USA to winter C America & coasts of tropical South America to Brazil & Peru.)

### Western/Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris mauri/pusilla* (0, 1, 0)

2009 Devon Dawlish Warren and Turf End, 8th April to 29th May, photo (L. Collins, I. Lakin, K. Rylands *et al.*).

When it comes to a multi-observed, well-documented rarity, there are surprisingly few instances when a firm identification cannot be arrived at. In the case of the Devon bird, good views in the field and a series of impeccable photographs simply failed to lead to a satisfactory conclusion. The plumage was an unfamiliar one and, despite experts from around the world voicing their opinions, it was not possible to reach a consensus. A common theme among commentators on



the Devon bird was the frequent changing of minds as the scenario played out; with each new set of photographs, a different impression was gained and a new certainty prevailed. Plainly the bird was either a Western or a Semipalmated, and the record deserves to be documented for posterity – and it can always be revisited.

It is important that either/or records such as this are not lost, especially as future research may unearth some hitherto unappreciated detail that will further our understanding of the identification issues. The stints, much like *Empidonax* flycatchers, are traditionally most tricky to separate, and it is sobering to realise that, even today, not every individual will conform to our understanding. In all but a few very special cases, the adjudication process should normally be rigorous enough to establish the identity of any well-documented rarity and, from a recording perspective, it is important that the either/or category is not entered into lightly. That said, challenging identifications do serve to remind us that there is still, thank goodness, much to learn.

### **Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (0, 74, 1)**

Sussex Adur Estuary, Lancing, 24th July (C. Corrigan, B. & P. James).

(European range restricted to small population in N Gulf of Bothnia, Finland, & Belarus. To E, breeds widely throughout N Russia to E Siberia. Winters along coasts of S & E Africa to Persian Gulf, Indian subcontinent, SE Asia & Australasia.)

### **Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* (1, 179, 4)**

Avon Chew Valley Lake, adult, 24th September 2011 to 21st April, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 584–585.

Cleveland Scaling Dam, 18th June, photo (D. J. Britton, L. Teate *et al.*); also seen Hertfordshire.

Devon Plym Estuary, juvenile, 3rd September 2011 to 1st February, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 584–585.

Dorset Lyme Regis, first-winter, 18th November 2011 to 29th January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 584–585. Stanpit Marsh, Christchurch Harbour, first-winter, 1st February to 31st March, photo (D. N. Smith, I. H. Southworth *et al.*).

Hertfordshire Hilfield Park Resr, 24th June (A. E. Blake); also seen Cleveland.

Outer Hebrides Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, juvenile, 7th–17th September (J. B. Kemp, A. Stevenson *et al.*).

Shetland Lower Voe, Mainland, juvenile, 30th September to 2nd October, photo (R. J. Irvine, M. A. Maher *et al.*).

The bird in Cleveland and Hertfordshire sported an interesting plumage, with relatively restricted spotting on the underparts despite the late-spring date. Reference to BBRC files for the last 15 years showed that such restricted spotting has not been shared by any other individuals at this season, at least in that time period. This enabled the two records to be linked with some confidence. There was speculation among voting members that this could indicate first-summer plumage or even hybridisation with Common Sandpiper *A. hypoleucos*, but we could find no evidence to support either explanation so the record was accepted as an unaged Spotted Sandpiper. The potential pitfall of ‘spotted’ Common Sandpipers (see *Birding World* 19: 140) should always be taken into consideration with individuals that deviate from the expected plumage.

(Breeds North America from W Alaska to Newfoundland & S to California, Texas & North Carolina. Some winter coastal USA to S of breeding range but most winter C America, Caribbean & N South America, S to N Argentina & Chile.)

### **Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* (6, 30, 1)**

Isles of Scilly The Hotel, Bryher, juvenile, 12th–14th October, photo (H. Cook, K. E. Vinicombe, S. Young *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 424; plate 344); presumed same Lower Moors then Old Town, St Mary’s, 15th–17th October (per birding information services).

(Breeds C & S Alaska E through boreal forest region of Canada to Quebec & Labrador. Migrates throughout USA & winters Caribbean & C America, S to Argentina.)





Gary Thoburn

**344.** Juvenile Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*, Bryher, Scilly, October 2012.

### **Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* (6, 25, 0)**

Caithness Loch of Mey, first-summer, 28th May, photo (I. Sargent); presumed same St John's Loch, Dunnet, 25th July to 1st August, photo (J. Smith *et al.*); also seen Highland, North-east Scotland.

Highland Knockglass, Loch Fleet, first-winter, 14th December 2011 to 26th January, photo, note revised dates, *Brit. Birds* 105: 585; presumed same Dornoch, 20th February, photo (A. Mainwood, A. Vittery); also seen Caithness, North-east Scotland.

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg RSPB, first-winter, 3rd March to 4th May, 14th–27th May, photo (P. A. A. Baxter, C. N. Gibbins *et al.*) and 26th–29th September, photo (T. Marshall *et al.*); presumed same Ythan Estuary, 5th–12th May (P. A. A. Baxter, C. N. Gibbins *et al.*); also seen Caithness, Highland.

(Breeds from S Alaska across subarctic Canada E to Labrador & Newfoundland. Migrates throughout USA to winter coastal S USA, C America, Caribbean & South America.)

### **Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (19, 309, 6)**

Clyde Islands Carrick Point, Isle of Bute, first-winter, 30th September to 3rd October, photo (I. Hopkins, D. Menzies *et al.*).

Cornwall Kingsmill Lake, Saltash, first-winter, 30th November 2011 to 7th April, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 586.

Devon Tamerton Creek, Plymouth, juvenile/first-winter, 20th October into 2013, photo (P. Edmonds, R. Eynon *et al.*).

Herefordshire Hereford Quarry, Hagley, adult, 20th May, photo (S. P. Coney *et al.*).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Aldcliffe Marsh, first-winter, 21st October to 5th December, photo (P. Crooks *et al.* per Lancashire & N Merseyside Recorder).

Lincolnshire Alkborough Flats and Bagmoor Floods, juvenile/first-winter, 30th October 2011 to 8th January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 586, presumed same, Alkborough Flats, 28th October to 8th December, photo (G. P. Catley, N. Drinkall *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plate 48).



Orkney Carness, St Ola, Mainland, adult, 30th–31st July (J. Branscombe, K. E. Hague, M. Russell).

Somerset Brue Estuary, first-winter, 31st December 2011 to 4th February, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 586. Curry Moor, juvenile, 29th September, photo (T. Raven *et al.*); presumed same King's Sedgemoor, 8th–12th October (T. Raven *et al.*).

(Breeds throughout much of subarctic Alaska & Canada, E to James Bay. Migrates through USA, where some overwinter, but majority winter from Caribbean & C America to Chile & Argentina.)

### Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* (6, 131, 1)

Shetland Pool of Virkie then Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, adult, 7th July, photo (R. M. Fray *et al.*).

This was only the second for Shetland and, some 43 years after the first, at Strand Loch in May 1969, was a welcome sight for most of the resident Shetland birders. Perhaps not surprisingly it is a very rare bird in northern Britain, and Scotland in particular, where there are (for example) just single records from both Orkney and the Outer Hebrides. The south and east coasts of England are the prime areas for finding a Marsh Sand, with Kent and Norfolk accounting for the lion's share of records. The 132 records between 1950 and 2012 show peaks of ten in both 1984 and 1999; late July and August is the prime time.

The Marsh Sandpiper maintains a toehold in eastern Europe but its range is contracting as a result of the loss of steppe habitats due to agricultural intensification (but possibly also as a result of egg-collecting). It may also be threatened by industrial pollution – for example high levels of pollutants have been recorded in the eggs of birds nesting in the Lake Baikal area ([www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)). All of which might mean that it is going to become an even rarer visitor to our shores.

Poorly seen or inadequately documented birds (in general) prove problematic for the Committee but this species has a track record of not-proven submissions – it is difficult to give precise figures, but as a guideline almost half of the submissions for Marsh Sandpiper since 2000 have been found not proven, which is in the region of four times the rate for waders in general.

(Breeds Ukraine & W Russia, & occasionally Finland & Baltic countries. To E, breeds in forest-steppe region of Siberia to Mongolia & NE China. Winters throughout sub-Saharan Africa, especially E Africa, & Indian subcontinent E to S China & SE Asia; also Australia.)



Gary Thoburn

345. Juvenile Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*, Lodmoor RSPB, Dorset, September 2012.



### Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* (0, 1, 2)

Dorset Lodmoor RSPB, juvenile, 3rd September to 6th October, photo (D. Croxson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 398; plate 345).

Isles of Scilly Gleaner Beach, Tresco, juvenile, 9th–21st September, photo (W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 399).

‘You wait 13 years for one, then two come along at once.’ Well maybe not quite as the apocryphal local bus, but more than welcome nonetheless. The only previous record was a bird at Rosehearty, in Northeast Scotland, on 11th–24th September 1999, which was later relocated in Cleveland. We know that juvenile dowitchers migrate later than adults and that, in autumn, Long-billed Dowitcher *L. scolopaceus* migrates later than Short-billed – so careful scrutiny of any juvenile dowitcher in early September is particularly worthwhile. In particular, the ‘tiger-striped’ tertials of juvenile Short-billed compared with the plain tertials of Long-billed should enable observers to separate these two species with confidence provided the bird has been aged correctly. As yet, no British records have been assigned to a particular subspecies.

(Three races breed in North America; race *caurinus* breeds from S Alaska to W Canada, race *hendersoni* breeds interior C Canada W of Hudson Bay, & nominate race breeds NE Canada from Ontario to Labrador. Migrates along both coastlines & interior USA to winter from coastal S USA to coastal Peru & Brazil.)

### Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (6, 219, 13)

Cambridgeshire Ouse Fen RSPB, adult, 7th–8th July, photo (R. D. Thomas *et al.*).

Carmarthenshire Kidwelly, juvenile/first-winter, 29th September 2011 to 20th April, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 583. Penclawdd WWT, Llanelli, adult, 28th–29th October, photo (L. Evans, R. H. A. Taylor per B. Stewart); also seen Gower.

Cheshire & Wirral Burton Mere Wetlands RSPB, juvenile/first-winter, 1st–19th October, photo (J. Gilbody *et al.*).

Cleveland Saltholme RSPB and Greenabella Marsh, male, 24th May to 17th June, photo (C. Sharp *et al.*).

Cumbria Hodbarrow RSPB, 9th–12th May, photo (D. Blackledge, M. Maclauchlan *et al.*).

Dorset Lodmoor RSPB, then The Fleet, two, first-winters, 2nd January to 1st February, one remaining to 5th March, photo (G. Barlow, D. Croxson, R. Morris *et al.* per Dorset Recorder), presumed same as Avon and Somerset 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 583; also seen Somerset.

Dumfries & Galloway Wigtown Harbour, first-winter, 5th January to 9th April (per Dumfries & Galloway Recorder), presumed same as Wigtown, Dumfries & Galloway 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 583.

Gloucestershire Slimbridge WWT, adult, 21st July to 12th December, photo (J. Lees *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 315).

Gower Dalton’s Point, Penclawdd, adult, 29th October (B. Stewart); also seen Carmarthenshire.

Hampshire Needs Ore, 10th March, photo (A. Davidson, L. Fuller).

Lincolnshire Alkborough Flats, juvenile/first-winter, 4th October into 2013, photo (N. Drinkall *et al.*) (plate 346).



Graham Catley

**346.** First-winter Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, Alkborough Flats, Lincolnshire, November 2012.



Northumberland Holy Island, juvenile, 28th September, photo (D. J. Britton, I. Kerr, R. J. Pacey *et al.*), presumed same Cresswell Ponds, 30th September to 1st October, photo (A. D. McLevy *et al.*), and Hauxley, 30th September, photo (I. Fisher *et al.*). Long Nanny, first-winter, 4th–18th November, photo (C. Bradshaw, J. G. Steele *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Loch Grogary, North Uist, juvenile, 4th–8th October, photo (B. Rabbitts *et al.*). Baleshare, North Uist, juvenile, 23rd October to 18th November, photo (S. E. Duffield *et al.*).

Somerset Greylake RSPB, Meare Heath and Catcott Lows, 17th–19th March, then two, 20th March to 30th April, both first-winters, photo (A. Ashman, J. A. Hazell, I. Hull, B. Ottery, M. Sage *et al.*); also seen Dorset.

Suffolk Livermere, 4th–6th May, photo (J. Walshe, P. Wilson *et al.*).

Long-billed Dowitchers have a tendency to return to the same sites each year but it is often impossible to be certain that any particular bird is a returnee. For example, in 2012 the juvenile at Kidwelly, in Carmarthenshire, could well have returned to Penclacwydd in late October. It seems likely that the numbers involved are actually less than those given in the statistics. The Cleveland bird was sexed as a male based on its display flight in response to playback of a pre-recorded song of this species.

(Breeds Arctic Siberia W to Lena River delta, & coastal tundra of W & N Alaska, E to Mackenzie River, Canada. Migrates through USA to winter coastal S USA to N/C America.)

### Great Snipe *Gallinago media* (532, 164, 2)

Cambridgeshire Nene Washes RSPB, 12th–13th September (J. P. Taylor).

Somerset West Sedgmoor RSPB, 25th May (D. J. Chown).

2011 Shetland Virkie, Mainland, 3rd May (R. M. Fray).

(Scarce & local breeder Norway & Sweden, which hold most of declining European population. Smaller & fragmented population breeds from Poland to Estonia. Also breeds E through European Russia, W & N Siberia E to Yenisey River. Winters sub-Saharan Africa.)

### Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* (2, 32, 2)

Cheshire & Wirral/Flintshire Burton Mere Wetlands RSPB, 3rd–4th May, photo (A. M. Conlin, R. Parry, K. Smith *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Loch Stiapavat, Lewis, first-summer, 2nd–6th August, photo (B. A. E. Marr *et al.*) (plate 347).

(European breeders confined to N Black Sea in Romania & Ukraine where rare & declining. To E, more numerous across steppes of S Russia to E Kazakhstan. Winters NE Namibia & Botswana, S to N Cape & E to W Natal, South Africa, & W Swaziland. Some apparently regularly winter Ethiopia.)



Tony Marr

347. Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, August 2012.



### Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* (37, 7, 1)

Herefordshire Bradnor Hill, 20th–23rd May, photo (C. & P. H. Downes *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 228; 106: plates 277, 348); also seen Radnorshire.

Radnorshire Stanner, 23rd May (M. Eaton *et al.*); also seen Herefordshire.

A hill-top golf course in Herefordshire is probably the last place that we might have expected to stage this species' first spring appearance in Britain. In such a splendid setting, this attractive, leggy shorebird was one of the highlights of 2012. Although adapted to a life in arid environments, Cream-coloured Coursers can often be found feeding on areas of short-cropped grass such as irrigated farmland, race tracks and golf courses in the Middle East.

This was only the eighth during the BBRC era and the first since the popular but ill-fated bird on Scilly in October 2004. All those since 1950 have arrived between 28th September and 23rd October, and none of the dated historical British records appeared outside the period from September to December.

Records elsewhere in northern Europe mirror those in Britain, with an absence of spring birds and the majority of autumn vagrants in October, although the pattern is somewhat different in Mediterranean countries. All nine Greek records have been in the spring and there is also a spring record from La Crau, in southern France. The pattern in Iberia shows a clear spring peak, with April the best month, followed by a smaller spike in August and September, clearly earlier than the October peak in more northern countries. The species bred in Spain in 2001.

Many Cream-coloured Coursers withdraw from the northern Sahara in winter, and the spring arrival dates around the Mediterranean correspond well with the return movement in the Sahara, which peaks in March and April. Spring records from Mediterranean countries presumably involve birds that have overshot their North African breeding grounds. Perhaps the severe drought conditions in Spain and Portugal in 2012, mentioned several times in this report already, were in some way responsible for the appearance of the Herefordshire courser?

(Breeds Cape Verde & Canary Islands E across deserts of N Africa, S to Chad & Sudan, & through Middle East to Turkmenistan, Iran, Afghanistan & Pakistan. Western populations resident, or dispersive to deserts S of breeding range, while eastern breeders winter from S Iran to deserts of NW India.)



Rich Andrews

348. Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*, Bradnor Hill, Herefordshire, May 2012.



Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (51, 289, 6)

Carmarthenshire Penclacwydd WWT, Llanelli, adult, 24th June, photo (R. H. A. Taylor, B. E. Thomas); also seen Gower.

Ceredigion Ynyslas NNR, adult, 2nd–6th August, photo (J. Baxter *et al.* per Welsh Recorder) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 316).

Dorset Lodmoor RSPB, adult, 29th June, photo (R. A. Ford *et al.*):

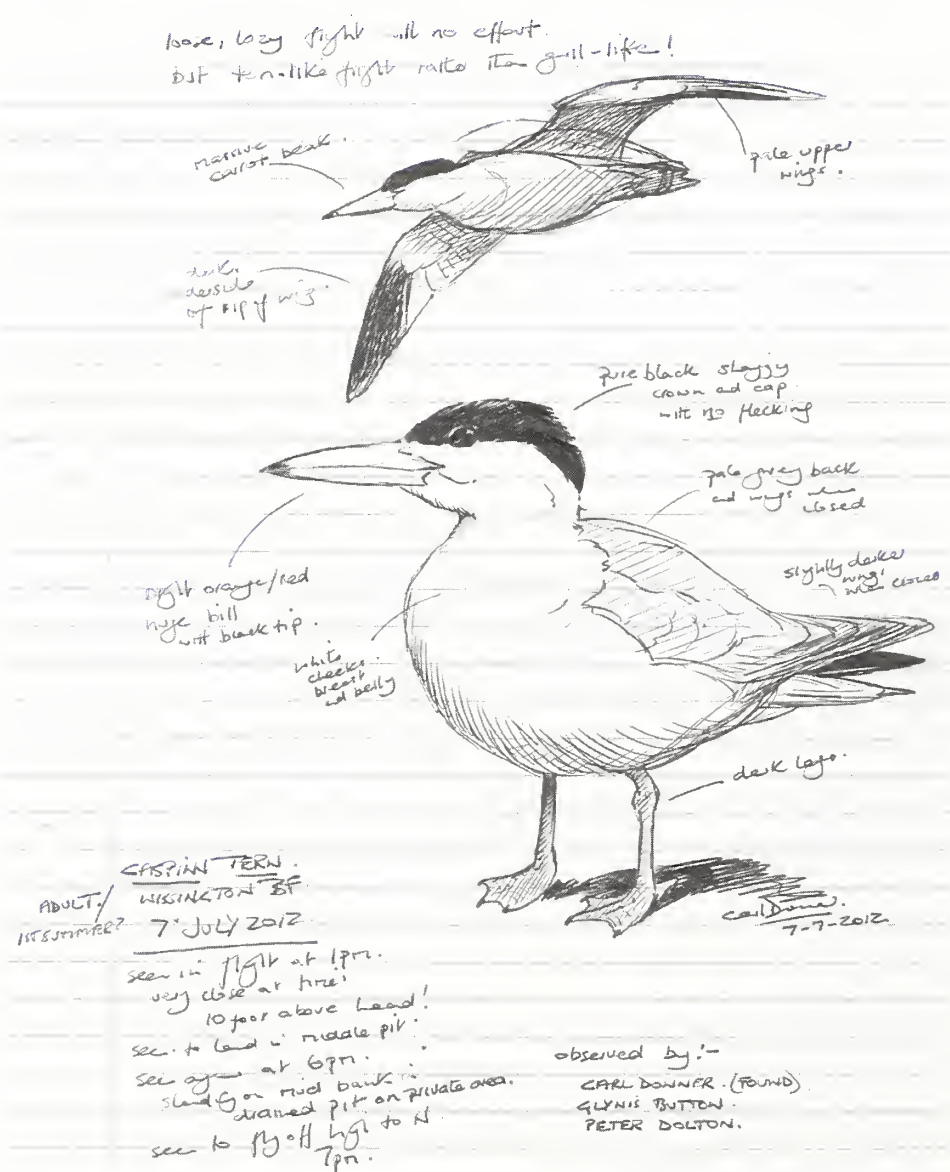
Gower Burry Inlet, Loughor Bridge, adult, 24th–27th June, photo (B. Stewart *et al.*); also seen Carmarthenshire.

Outer Hebrides Loch Na Liana Moire, Askernish, South Uist, adult, 25th July (R. D. Goater).

Yorkshire Thorne Moors, adult, 30th May, photo (B. P. Wainwright *et al.*). Tophill Low, adult, 25th August, photo (D. G. Fairweather, R. Hampshire, M. G. Hodges *et al.*).

(In Europe, small population breeds N Germany & Denmark. Widespread though local Spain, elsewhere colonies small & isolated. To E, breeds discontinuously from Turkey & SW Russia through Kazakhstan, Mongolia & NW China, with isolated population NE China. European population winters coastal W Africa, S to Gulf of Guinea. Asian populations winter Persian Gulf to Indian subcontinent & SE Asia. Other races occur Australia & the Americas.)

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* (26, 267, 3)



Norfolk Wissington Beet Factory, 7th July (C. Donner *et al.*) (fig. 2). Strumpshaw Fen RSPB and Buckenham Marshes RSPB, adult, 17th–19th July, photo (M. Chipperfield, P. J. Heath *et al.*); presumed same Breydon Water RSPB, 18th–19th July (P. R. Allard *et al.*).

Suffolk Minsmere RSPB, adult, 6th July, photo (J. H. Grant, P. J. Woolnough *et al.*).

1973 Suffolk Minsmere RSPB, adult, 2nd August (R. D. Goater *et al.*).

(European population breeds Baltic coasts of Estonia, Sweden & Finland to head of Gulf of Bothnia. To E, fragmented populations from Black Sea coast of Ukraine across steppe-lake region of C Asia to NW Mongolia & E China. European birds winter W Africa to Gulf of Guinea, Asian birds winter on coasts to S of breeding range. Other populations occur Australia, S Africa & North America.)

Fig. 2. Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*, Wissington Beet Factory, Norfolk, July 2012.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* (23, 181, 1)

Derbyshire Long Eaton GP, adult, 25th April, photo (R. Hoare); also seen Nottinghamshire.

Nottinghamshire Thrumpton, adult, 25th April, photo (R. Hoare); also seen Derbyshire.

(Breeds in small, scattered colonies through S & E Europe from Iberia to Poland. Numerous & widespread from N Black Sea E to W Kazakhstan, with Volga/Ural River complex holding most of European population. Winters tropical W & C Africa & from Nile Delta to E Africa. Other populations occur Indian subcontinent, E Asia, S Africa & Australia.)



## Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

### North American race, 'American Black Tern' *C. n. surinamensis* (0, 4, 1)

Greater Manchester Pennington Flash, juvenile, 1st September, photo (B. Harrison, I. McKerchar *et al.*); also seen Lancashire & North Merseyside.

Lancashire & North Merseyside Eccleston Mere, juvenile, 30th August to 4th September, photo (C. Davies *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 400; plate 349); also seen Greater Manchester.

With this record, the number of American Black Terns seen in Britain draws level with the tally for Ireland, bringing the score to five apiece at the end of 2012. Including the first records (in Avon and Co. Dublin during the autumn of 1999), all ten British and Irish sightings have occurred in just a 14-year period, so it seems highly likely that *surinamensis* is only now being encountered because the field identification characters have been recently distilled, and that in the past this taxon would simply have been overlooked. The 2012 bird was the first to be found in northwest England (the previous four being in Avon, the Outer Hebrides, Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire in 1999, 2008, 2009 and 2011 respectively) and, like all the others seen in Britain, it was a juvenile. Birds in other age categories have been seen in the Western Palearctic (a breeding-plumaged adult visited Madeira in 2007, while a first-summer showed up in Ireland in July 2006), so logic dictates that we do need to be on the lookout for other plumages as well. Since the post-breeding moult of *surinamensis* is on average later than that of nominate Black Tern, Nearctic birds may retain a fully black head and body well into the autumn. Conveniently, the 2012 individual was accompanied by a juvenile Black Tern *C. n. niger*, so a range of subtle differences could be appreciated: in addition to the rather obvious pale crown and grey-smoked flanks, the dark rump and tail, plain grey-brown upperparts and dusky underwings proved a failsafe combination.

(Race *surinamensis* breeds widely throughout temperate interior Canada & N USA. Migrates through interior & coastal USA to winter Panama to N South America, S to Peru & Venezuela.)



Steve Young/Birdwatch

**349.** Juvenile American Black Tern' *Chlidonias niger surinamensis*, Eccleston Mere, Lancashire & North Merseyside, August 2012.

## Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* (8, 180, 9)

Argyll Add Estuary, Crinan, adult, 1st–12th August, photo (J. M. Dickson, D. C. Jardine *et al.*).

Devon Dawlish Warren, adult, 21st October to 19th November, photo (S. G. Edwards *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plate 49), presumed same as Dawlish Warren, Devon 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 588.



Co. Durham Whitburn, adult, 16th August to 19th September, photo (D. M. Foster *et al.*), presumed same as Co. Durham 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 588.

East Glamorgan Cardiff Bay and Cardiff Heliport, adult, 22nd January to 31st March, photo (G. N. Smith *et al.*), presumed same as East Glamorgan 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 588. Cardiff Bay, first-winter, 17th–25th February, photo (D. K. Campbell, I. R. Jones *et al.*).

Gloucestershire Newnham, first-winter, 30th March to 3rd April, photo (J. Sanders *et al.*).

Greater London Cross Ness and Barking Bay, first-winter, 19th–29th May, photo (R. H. Bonser *et al.*). Cross Ness, first-summer, 26th–29th May, photo (R. H. Bonser, J. R. Jones *et al.*).

Northamptonshire Boddington Resr, adult, 1st–3rd November, photo (G. Pullan *et al.*).

Northumberland Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, first-winter, 5th March (T. C. Lowe).

Outer Hebrides Loch Branahuie, Lewis, first-winter, 20th January, photo (M. S. Scott).

Pembrokeshire Strumble Head, adult, 16th–20th October (C. Hurford, R. Liford, A. Rogers *et al.*).

(Breeds widely across N North America from W & C Alaska through Canada to James Bay. Winters locally on ice-free rivers & lakes in N USA, & S along both coasts of USA to Mexico & Caribbean.)

## Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* (1, 192, 3)

Avon Severn Beach, second-summer/adult, 1st May (B. Lancaster).

Cumbria Dalton-in-Furness, first-winter, 17th–18th March, photo (A. Mackay, C. Raven *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Roseheart, second-winter, 19th–31st December, photo (H. E. Maggs *et al.*).

(Breeds along E seaboard of USA from Nova Scotia, Canada, S to Florida & Gulf coast, the Caribbean, & C America to N Venezuela. Southern populations largely resident but N breeders winter within southern breeding range.)

## Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* (2, 9, 0)

2011 Norfolk Hickling, first-winter, 19th March, photo (C. & J. Gould).

Prior to 2002, birders could have been forgiven for thinking that this species was a mythical beast that would most likely require a costly twitch to some far-flung offshore island. Little did anyone realise that the one in Highland in 2002 was the forerunner of six in ten years. From extreme vagrant to biannual rarity, just what has changed? It seems likely that the rise of digital photography is yet again responsible, since at least four of these six records were identified retrospectively from photographs. Only one, the Chipping Ongar bird in 2010, remained for anyone other than the finders to enjoy, and this year's bird was no exception. It was photographed near the popular Hickling Broad car park by visitors on a trip to see Common Cranes *Grus grus*, but its true identity was not established until the photos were examined in detail. Unfortunately, the images are not quite good enough to be sure of the racial identity. Representing only the second record for Norfolk, after one was shot at Castle Rising in January 1946, this would have been a very popular bird had it lingered.

The identification of Oriental Turtle Dove has been examined in detail recently after a spate of late-autumn Turtle Doves *S. turtur* caused some confusion. Key features to look for include the ratio of primary projection to tail length; the presence or absence of broad pale tips to the primary coverts, which are often just exposed on the leading edge of the closed wing beyond the greater coverts; the overall coloration of breast and underparts; the number of any neck bars moulted through; the size and shape of the bare skin around the eye; and the exact patterning of the tertials and coverts. Notes on size and shape in comparison with other pigeons or doves are also potentially useful.

(Breeds from S Urals, E to Japan & S to Tien Shan & Himalayas, C China & Taiwan. Northern populations migratory, wintering SE Iran, Indian subcontinent, & from S China to N Thailand & Indochina.)

## Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

### Central European race, 'Dark-breasted Barn Owl' *T. a. guttata* (–, [8], 1)

At Sea 60 km south of Plymouth, 26th October, photo (F. Bartlett).

2005 Shetland Veensgarth, Mainland, 13th–25th April, found dead, photo, specimen in the



National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh (P. Sclater *et al.*), presumed same as Shetland 2004 (see below).

**2004 Shetland** Veensgarth, Mainland, 24th October to 11th November, photo (P. Sclater *et al.*), presumed same Reawick, Mainland, 18th December to 5th March 2005, photo (R. Cree-Hay *et al.*).

**2001 Shetland** Houbie, Fetlar, 25th October, found dead, photo, specimen in the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh (P. Sawford, M. M. Smith).

**1999 Shetland** Sumburgh, Mainland, 30th October to 15th November, trapped, photo (P. M. Ellis, P. V. Harvey, I. S. Robertson *et al.*).

**1982 Shetland** Sandwick, Mainland, probable male, 10th–11th November, found dead on 11th, photo, specimen in private collection (per D. Coutts).

**1951 Shetland** Sumburgh, Mainland, 16th October, shot, photo, specimen in the Shetland Museum, Lerwick (per Shetland Recorder).

The sole record for 2012 concerned a bird identified by Kevin Hale, who was shown a photo taken by skipper Fred Bartlett of an owl that spent 12 hours on board a trawler in the Western Approaches.

The criteria for acceptance of Dark-breasted Barn Owls in Britain have already been published (French 2009). In summary, the diagnostic characters are wholly buff underparts, including the legs and vent; dark markings on the facial disc, at least around the eyes; and the extensive grey on the upperparts. Some birds, with dark underparts but without all the key characters, presumably originate from the wide area of intergradation between the dark-breasted *guttata* and the pale-breasted *alba*. As discussed by French (2009), intergrades may be fairly frequent in southeast England and true *guttata* may be relatively rare.

The five Shetland records are the first batch of historical records to be submitted. For four of these there are existing specimens, while the bird in 1999 was trapped and photographed. One other record from Shetland was submitted (also photographed, though not trapped): a bird on Bressay in 2004, which had a pale vent and all-white facial disc, which was considered to be an intergrade. Another post-1950 claim of *guttata* from Shetland was not submitted owing to a lack of evidence, and there are also some pre-1950 records for the islands that will need to be assessed locally.

BBRC welcomes further submissions of post-1950 records of Dark-breasted Barn Owl. A collated series of records from any county is especially welcome, as this helps us to build up a true picture more quickly, but individual observers are also encouraged to submit records. Until this process is complete (and pre-1950 records are also assessed), the figures for accepted records will remain incomplete.

(Race *guttata* mostly resident to N & E of nominate race, from Netherlands & Denmark, E to W Russia & S to Bulgaria, largely E of the 3°C January isotherm. Intergrades with nominate race are frequent towards W & S limits of its range.)

## Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* (44, 37, 1)

**Isles of Scilly** Higher Moors, St Mary's, 25th–26th March (J. Higginson per Isles of Scilly Recorder).

This is the first since the calling bird at Thrupp, Oxfordshire, in 2006 and 2007. Intuitively, it might be assumed that southwest England, and Scilly in particular, would be geographically well-placed to receive the majority of Britain's Scops Owls. But this is just the fourth for that archipelago since 1950, and the first since one on Tresco in April 1989. In fact, Scotland boasts some 16 post-1950 records including a combined total of 13 from the Northern Isles, and accounts for 42% of all BBRC-era occurrences. Any bird that resembles a broken branch and spends the day motionless and hidden among dense foliage must surely be overlooked – and perhaps explains the preponderance of records from largely treeless islands. This is one species where improved optics, digital photography and a large increase in observers may not boost the totals – how many of us explore our neighbourhoods at night in April and May to listen for owls?



(Breeds N Africa & S Europe, from Iberia N to C France & E to Greece. Also breeds Ukraine, S Russia & S Siberia to W Mongolia, Kazakhstan & Iran. Most winter N equatorial Africa, but some remain S Europe.)

### Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* (196, 209, 1)

Outer Hebrides Grenitote and Sollas, North Uist, adult male, 14th May to 11th June, photo (C. Round *et al.*), presumed same as North Uist, Outer Hebrides 2010, *Brit. Birds* 104: 590. St Kilda, male, 15th–30th July, photo (G. Prior *et al.*).

2011 Outer Hebrides Crowlista, Lewis, adult male, 25th February, photo (per B. Rabbitts), presumed same as Outer Hebrides 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 591. Grenitote, North Uist, adult male, 25th April to 12th May, photo (J. Boyle *et al.*), presumed same as Outer Hebrides (Hirta, St Kilda) 2010 (see below).

2010 Outer Hebrides Hirta, St Kilda, adult male, 15th April to 25th July, photo (T. Begg, W. T. S. Miles, S. Money *et al.*), note revised dates and observers, *Brit. Birds* 104: 590.

(Breeds N Scandinavia & Iceland, depending on availability of small mammals. Outside Europe, erratic circumpolar breeder across tundra & N islands of Arctic Russia, Siberia, Alaska, Canada & N Greenland. Most disperse S in winter but some resident or nomadic if food available.)

### Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* (0, 80, 0)

2010 Kent Dungeness RSPB, 29th–30th March, photo (S. J. Broyd *et al.*).

(Breeds throughout Mediterranean basin from Iberia to Greece, but absent from many regions. Outside Europe, breeds locally from Mauritania & Canary Islands across NW Africa & Middle East to Arabian Peninsula & coastal S Iran. Most winter N African tropics, but some remain S Europe.)

### Little Swift *Apus affinis* (0, 23, 1)

Cheshire & Wirral New Brighton, juvenile, 22nd–29th June, photo (J. Thorpe, M. Turner *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 270; plate 350).

This species gets no commoner; there have been just three in the last eight years including this individual, which, at eight days, becomes the longest staying of all the British Little Swifts on record. It was a well-watched and well-photographed bird and was clearly in juvenile plumage, suggesting it fledged earlier in 2012. There have been at least two other spring Little Swifts that appeared to be in fresh juvenile plumage (Isle of Wight on 5th–6th May 1997 and Nottingham on 26th–29th May 2001). This again prompts the question of just where our Little Swifts come

from. The closest birds breed in North Africa, and southern Spain where the population is small, and are believed to be largely sedentary. Alternatively, they could originate from farther south or east, having fledged outside the Western Palearctic. Whatever their origin, it appears that they mix and move with northbound waves of Common Swifts *Apus apus*.

(Breeds locally Morocco, & throughout Middle East from Israel to SE Iran & N along Euphrates River to SE Turkey. Largely resident, but some Middle East populations migratory. Elsewhere, resident or dispersive throughout sub-Saharan Africa & Indian subcontinent to Sri Lanka.)



Steve Young/Birdwatch

**350.** Juvenile Little Swift *Apus affinis*, New Brighton, Cheshire & Wirral, June 2012.



## European Roller *Coracias garrulus* (196, 115, 2)

Devon Teignmouth, 1st May (A. Normand).

North-east Scotland Cowbog, New Pit-sligo, 12th–15th July, photo (D. Brown *et al.*); also seen Orkney, Yorkshire.

Orkney Finstown, Mainland, adult, 25th–30th July, photo (G. & R. Brown, A. Upton *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 318); also seen North-east Scotland, Yorkshire.

Yorkshire Spurn and Kilnsea, adult male, 29th May, photo (K. Allinson, M. Garner *et al.*); presumed same Aldbrough, 31st May to 14th June, photo (per birding information services) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 229; plate 351); also seen North-east Scotland, Orkney.

(NW Africa & S Europe from Portugal to Greece, & locally through Balkan countries & E Poland to Estonia & E to Ukraine. More numerous from Turkey & S Russia to S Urals, SW Siberia & C Asia to W China & N Pakistan.

Some winter equatorial W Africa but most winter E Africa from Kenya to Zimbabwe.)



Richard Stonier

**351.** Adult male European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, Aldbrough, Yorkshire, June 2012.

## Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* (0, 124, 1)

Shetland Norwick, Unst, first-winter, 12th–15th September, photo (P. J. Morris, S. Petrek *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 403; plate 352).

2011 Isles of Scilly Lower Moors, St Mary's, 25th September (J. M. Turton), presumed same as Porth Hellick, Scilly 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 592.

2011 Outer Hebrides Stornoway, 9th October (A. Maccormick).

A long-awaited first for Shetland, which becomes the earliest British record, beating one on St Mary's (Scilly) in September 2011 by one day, although it falls a week shy of one on Cape Clear, Co. Cork, on 5th September 2004.

(Breeds throughout S Canada, & USA E of Rocky Mountains. Migrates throughout E USA to winter N South America. Other races resident South America.)



Rob Brookes

**352.** First-winter Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, Norwick, Unst, Shetland, September 2012.





**353.** Adult male Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, Portland Bill, Dorset, October 2012.

### Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* (0, 89, 2)

Dorset Portland Bill, adult male, 23rd–27th October, photo (per Dorset Recorder) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 426; plate 353).

Shetland Hestingott, Toab and Virkie, Mainland, adult female, 27th September to 5th October, photo (P. M. Ellis, K. D. Shaw *et al.*).

Both of these individuals showed characteristics of ‘Daurian Shrike’ *L. i. isabellinus*. The striking adult male in Dorset has provided the opportunity for BOURC to reconsider its position on admitting this form to the British List. When BOURC examined the findings of the BBRC review on subspecies identification, they concluded that subspecies identity could be determined with confidence only for birds in adult male plumage. With this in mind we have passed details of the bird on Fetlar, Shetland, in September 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 600), along with those of the Dorset bird from 2012, to BOURC for consideration. We hope that this will enable ‘Daurian Shrike’ to achieve long overdue recognition as a British bird. It was accorded full species status in the *Collins Bird Guide* (2nd edn, 2009), and is widely perceived by BBRC members and the birding community to be the more regular of the two ‘Isabelline Shrikes’ that occur in Britain (the other being ‘Turkestan Shrike’ *L. i. phoenicuroides*).

(Breeds widely across arid regions of C Asia from Caspian Sea & W Iran E to Tajikistan, Afghanistan, N Pakistan, S Mongolia & NW China, with isolated subspecies in Zaidam depression, N Tibetan Plateau. Winters NE & E Africa, S Arabian Peninsula, S Iran & NW Indian subcontinent.)

### Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* (21, 164, 2)

Isles of Scilly Garrison, St Mary’s, adult male, 22nd August, photo (A. R. Ebbesen, C. Leth *et al.*).

Shetland Aithbank, Fetlar, adult, 14th September, photo (A. Cook).

(Breeds Balkans to E Poland, with small numbers W through N Mediterranean to S France & NE Spain. To E, breeds locally from Black Sea coasts, across S Russia & Kazakhstan to NW China & SW Siberia. Migrates through E Africa to winter S Africa, from Namibia to S Mozambique & N South Africa.)

### Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* (0, 257, 13)

Avon Portbury Wharf, two, 15th January, photo (D. Kilham, H. Taffs, J. Wood per Avon Recorder).

Bedfordshire Marston Vale CP, two, 10th November (N. Wright *et al.*).



Cambridgeshire Ouse Fen RSPB, two, first-winters, 2nd–15th December, sound recording, photo (R. D. Thomas *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plate 50). Little Paxton GP, first-winter, 8th December (R. M. Patient).

Isles of Scilly Great Pool, Tresco, first-winter, 20th–27th October, photo (D. Acfield, S. J. Broyd *et al.*).

Kent Dungeness RSPB, adult male, 20th February to 1st March (P. Trodd), presumed same 5th November into 2013, photo (per birding information services); presumed same as Kent 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 594. Oare Marshes, 30th–31st October, photo (A. Foster, K. Jenner *et al.*). Grove Ferry, 6th–13th November, photo (per birding information services). Reculver Marshes, 8th November (M. J. Hindle).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Leighton Moss RSPB, adult male, 11th February (M. Mainwaring, J. Taylor), presumed same 17th March, photo (A. Blagden), and 7th April (J. Lishman *et al.*); presumed same as Lancashire & North Merseyside 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 594.

Suffolk Minsmere RSPB, two, male and female, 26th March, photo (L. & M. C. Cantrell).

(Widely but locally distributed throughout C & E Europe, from Denmark, Germany & Italy NE to C Sweden & Estonia. Absent from much of NW Europe but locally numerous Spain. To E, breeds from S Russia to Volga River. Largely resident or dispersive Europe. Other races, sometimes regarded as separate species, occur C Asia & from S Siberia to NE China, & winter NW Indian subcontinent, S China & S Japan.)

### Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* (0, 16, 1)

Kent Sandwich Bay, 5th May (S. J. Broyd, M. C. Buckland, G. N. Howard, M. J. Lawson *et al.*).

(Breeds on steppe grasslands from Iberia & Morocco E throughout much of Mediterranean basin, also Ukraine, Turkey & SW Russia to Kazakhstan, NW China & Afghanistan. European & S Asian populations resident or nomadic, while N Asian populations disperse S of breeding range, wintering S to Persian Gulf coast of Iran.)

### Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* (12, 10, 1)

Kent Dungeness, 7th May (W. Atridge, P. Trodd *et al.*).

(Mostly resident throughout Continental Europe N to Denmark, E through C Asia to NE China & Korean Peninsula. To S breeds across Africa S to Sierra Leone E to Somalia, also E through Arabian Peninsula & Iran to NW & N India.)

### Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

#### East Asian races, 'Asian Red-rumped Swallow' *C. d. dauricaljaponica* (0, 1, 0)

2011 Highland Talisker Bay, Skye, adult, 17th June (R. & S. Hamilton); presumed same 29th June, photo (I. Fulton) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plates 264 & 265; plate 354); also seen Orkney.

2011 Orkney Nearhouse, Sanday, adult, 9th June, photo (R. & S. Thorne *et al.*); also seen Highland.

The Red-rumped Swallow, in its various guises, breeds from southern Europe, east to Japan and throughout much of India, as well as in West and East Africa. The species complex comprises many quite distinct forms, and is long overdue a complete taxonomic review. Populations breeding in the Eastern Palearctic and Oriental regions differ from our familiar European form mainly in showing conspicuous streaking on the throat and underparts, a darker face pattern and



Ian Fulton

**354.** Adult Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis d. dauricaljaponica*, Talisker Bay, Skye, Highland, June 2011.



an incomplete pale collar (interrupted by dark blue nape feathering). Other, less arresting, plumage features, such as an often more uniform rufous, lightly streaked rump, can be added to the list given suitable views, but birders encountering an Asian bird in a vagrant context, after first identifying it as a Red-rumped Swallow by its obvious pale rump, will quickly notice the strongly striated underparts and lack of the expected orange collar.

The two East Asian forms, *C. d. daurica* and *C. d. japonica*, share similar plumage patterns and both are liberally streaked below, but there is so much individual variation that it may not be possible to assign a lone vagrant to either subspecies safely. Although *japonica* averages a little smaller, and some individuals appear less buff and more heavily streaked below than *daurica*, with rather dense black streaking on the throat and ear-coverts, it may be best to hold them both under the same 'Asian Red-rumped Swallow' umbrella.

The Scottish bird of 2011 represents the first record of Asian Red-rumped Swallow in Britain. Amazingly, it was photographed at two different sites — three weeks and 300 km apart. The series of photographs of this bird taken by Ian Fulton at Talisker Bay on Skye were chosen as the winner of the 2012 Carl Zeiss Award (*Brit. Birds* 105: plates 264 and 265). These not only established that it was definitely of eastern origin, but also that the same individual was involved in both sightings. Tveit (2011) covered the identification of 'Asian Red-rumped Swallow' and reviewed its status in the Western Palearctic; to date there are six European records (three in Norway and singles in Scotland, the Netherlands and Sweden, the last being well photographed in June 2013). Since five of these have been seen in just the last eight years, there seems every chance that more will be identified in the near future, and for the 'armchair lister', seeing one in Britain might ultimately prove rewarding. Asian Red-rumped Swallow is without doubt a prime candidate for splitting.

(Races *daurica* & *japonica* breed E Asia from Baikal region, N Mongolia & NE China S through Japan & China. Winters SE India to S China, N Thailand & Indochina.)

## Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

### Northern race, 'Northern Long-tailed Tit' *A. c. caudatus* (–, [25], 2)

Yorkshire Calderdale, two, 10th January to 20th February, photo (N. Dawtrey, S. E. Drake *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 100).

1997 Kent St Margaret's Bay, 14th March (J. & P. Chantler, R. Heading).

(N & E Europe, & N Asia E through Siberia & N Mongolia to Kamchatka, Hokkaido & NE China. Largely resident or dispersive outside the breeding season.)

## Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* (11, 309, 14)

Fair Isle Kirn o' Skroo, first-winter, 19th August, photo (E. Tooth *et al.*). Gilsetter and Setter, first-winter, 21st August (W. T. S. Miles, J. Moss *et al.*). Gully and Bull's Park, first-winter, 29th August to 5th September, trapped, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*). Plantation, first-winter, 21st–23rd September, trapped, photo (W. T. S. Miles *et al.*). Boini Mire, Shirva and Midway, first-winter, 27th–30th September, photo (S. Arlow *et al.*) (plate 355). Wester Lothar, 2nd October (D. Barr, P. R. Davis).

Norfolk Brancaster Staithe, 24th–25th October, photo (G. Etherington *et al.*).

Northumberland Holy Island, first-winter, 26th–29th September, photo (A. S. Jack *et al.*).

Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, 27th June, trapped, photo (J. Dunn, J. L. Irvine, B. Marshall). Halligarth, Unst, 1st–3rd September (C. C. Rodger, B. H. Thomason). North Roe, Mainland, first-winter, 22nd September, photo (N. Charleson). Ronas Voe, Mainland, first-winter, 21st–22nd October, photo (M. S. Chapman *et al.*). Helendale, Lerwick, Mainland, first-winter, 6th–10th November, photo (L. Dalziel, P. V. Harvey, R. M. Tallack *et al.*).

Yorkshire Flamborough Head, first-winter, 1st–2nd September, photo (R. Baines, M. Garner, A. Malley *et al.*).

2011 Fair Isle Schoolton, first-winter, 12th–14th August, photo (N. J. Riddiford *et al.*).

Fig. 3 shows an occurrence pattern that seems to have changed little in more than 30 years, despite advances in identification, observer numbers and quality of equipment. The 14 records in



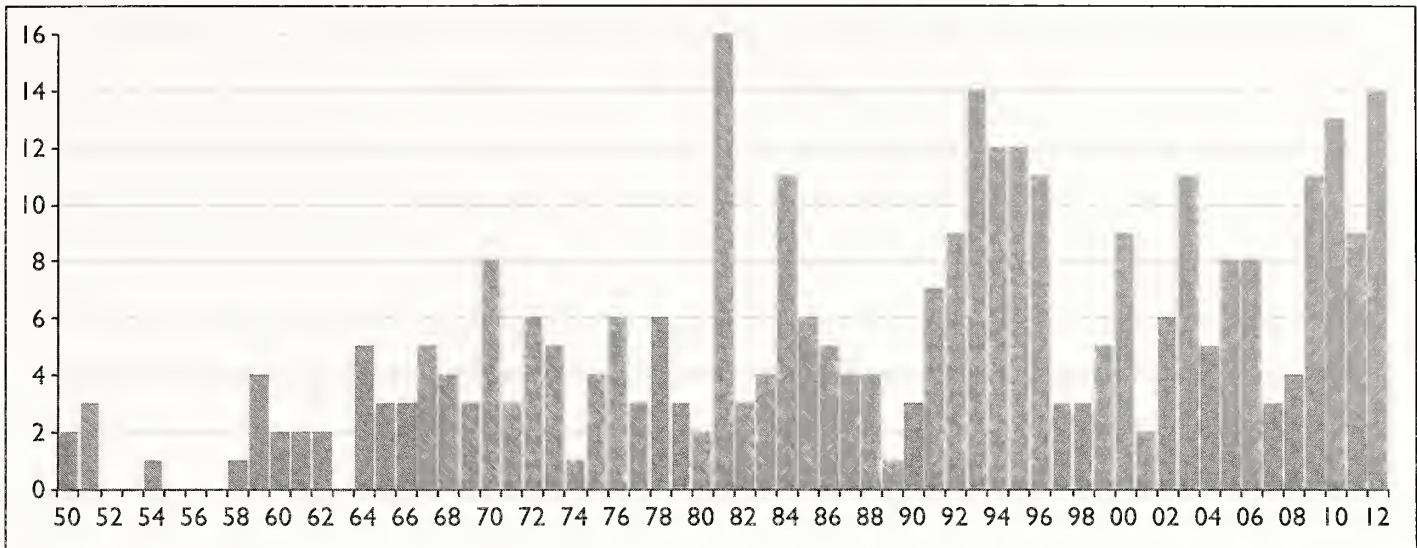


Fig. 3. Annual totals of Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* in Britain, 1950–2012.

2012 equalled the tally for 1993 and were eclipsed only by the 16 in 1981. Shetland dominated the share of this year’s glut of Arctic Warblers (as it invariably does), and since autumn birds can turn up anytime between August and November the arrival date is not necessarily a helpful guide to identification.

Although the occurrence pattern has remained relatively constant, the realm of Arctic Warbler identification has changed enormously. Faced with a *Phylloscopus* roughly the size of a Willow Warbler *P. trochilus* and sporting a wing-bar or two, observers must now consider a plethora of confusingly similar taxa: three in the ‘Greenish Warbler complex’ and now three species in the equivalent ‘Arctic Warbler complex’ (Alström *et al.* 2011). Added to that is the challenge of separating Pale-legged *P. tenellipes* and Sakhalin Leaf Warblers *P. borealoides*, while Eastern Crowned Warbler *P. coronatus* is perhaps the most straightforward of this group to identify. So far, the spectre of Western Crowned Leaf Warbler *P. occipitalis* has yet to raise its head, but with breeding and wintering ranges which, in parts, overlap with those of Hume’s Warbler *P. humei* in Central Asia, could this be the next challenge to face European observers?

With the occurrence of a Pale-legged/Sakhalin Leaf Warbler and an Eastern Crowned Warbler in western Europe in October 2012, all this is not merely idle conjecture. The larger wing-barred *Phylloscopus* warblers remain top-drawer finds anywhere and calls can often be more useful than plumage.

(Breeds locally N Scandinavia, becoming widespread across N Russia E to extreme NE Siberia, S to Baikal region, Ussuriland & NE China. Winters throughout SE Asia to Java, Philippines & Sulawesi.)



Steve Arlow

355. First-winter Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, Fair Isle, September 2012.



### **Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* (0, 122, 3)**

Dorset Littlesea Wood, Wyke Regis, 23rd November 2011 to 26th April, sound recording, trapped, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 596–597.

Fair Isle Lerness, 17th–18th October, photo (J. Moss *et al.*).

Shetland Norwick, Unst, 16th–24th October, photo (P. V. Harvey, B. H. Thomason *et al.*).

Sussex Belle Tout Wood, Beachy Head, 30th October to 4th November, photo (J. H. Marchant *et al.*).

2011 Suffolk Gunton, 13th–15th November, sound recording, photo (A. C. Easton, R. Wilton, R. Wincup *et al.*).

1997 Sussex Sheepcote Valley, 16th–22nd November, sound recording (J. F. Cooper, R. J. Fairbank, J. A. Hanlon, I. J. Whitcombe *et al.*), note revised observers, *Brit. Birds* 91: 507.

(Breeds Altai Mountains to W Mongolia, S through Tien Shan & Pamirs to NE Afghanistan, NW Himalayas & mountains of NW China. Winters S Afghanistan to N India, E to W Bengal. Another race breeds C China from Hebei to S Yunnan, W to lower slopes of Tibetan Plateau.)

### **Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* (1, 106, 4)**

Isles of Scilly Garrison, St Mary's, 20th–21st September, photo (A. Gardener *et al.*). Higher Town, St Martin's, 1st–6th October, photo (R. L. Flood per Isles of Scilly Recorder).

Orkney Holland House, North Ronaldsay, 1st–30th July, trapped, photo (R. J. Else *et al.*).

Yorkshire Flamborough Head, 17th–18th September, photo (J. A. Beaumont *et al.*).

2011 Cornwall Polgigga, 20th–23rd August, photo (B. Richards, M. D. Wallace *et al.*), previously accepted as Western/Eastern Bonelli's but now considered to have been Western after additional information submitted, *Brit. Birds* 105: 598; also note revised observers.

2008 Fair Isle Hjukni Geo, 17th–18th September, photo (P. Mayer *et al.* per Fair Isle Recorder), previously accepted as Western/Eastern Bonelli's but now considered to have been Western Bonelli's after additional information submitted, *Brit. Birds* 104: 597.

(Breeds SW Europe from Iberia to N France, S Germany, Italy, Austria, & locally in mountains of N Africa. Winters along S edge of Sahara, from Senegal & S Mauritania to N Cameroon.)

### **Western Bonelli's/Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli/orientalis* (0, 74, 1)**

Isles of Scilly The Hotel, Bryher, 26th August, photo (B. Thomas per Isles of Scilly Recorder).

### **Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* (0, 28, 2)**

Cornwall Kenidjack Valley, male in song, 28th May to 24th June, photo (P. Clarke *et al.*).

Somerset Porlock, male in song, 5th June to 29th July, sound recording, photo (J. J. Packer, A. Pym *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 271).

(Breeds locally French Pyrenees & S throughout W Iberia. N African range restricted to NW Morocco & N Algeria to NW Tunisia. Wintering range poorly known.)

### **Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* (0, 5, 1)**

Cleveland Hartlepool Headland, first-summer *S. h. hortensis*, 29th May, sound recording, trapped, photo (C. Brown, T. Francis, G. Joynt *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 230; plates 356–358).

Yet another mega from the mist-nets at Hartlepool Headland, almost a year since the White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis* at the same site. After release, the Orphean quickly settled down and began feeding in bushes fringing the headland's bowling green, where it was quite active for most of the morning. It was generally less obliging in the afternoon but towards the evening it became quite active again and showed well to everyone who could get there in time.

While the identification as Orphean Warbler was straightforward, determining the age, sex and racial provenance proved to be more challenging. Lars Svensson reviewed the photographs and commented that the best character for separating Western Orphean (race *hortensis*) from Eastern Orphean (races *crassirostris*, *balchanica* and *jerdoni*) is the pattern on the outermost tail



Brian Clasper



Steve Young/Birdwatch

Martyn Sidwell

**356–358.** First-summer Orphean Warbler *Sylvia h. hortensis*, Hartlepool Headland, Cleveland, May 2012.

feather (R6). Western Orphean shows a long, narrow white wedge on the inner web of R6, whereas Eastern Orphean shows a broader, shorter wedge. In his studies he found no overlap in this character between adults, and 90% of first-year birds could also be separated. He summed it up as follows: Western Orphean shows a Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* pattern, whereas Eastern Orphean has a Blyth's Pipit *A. godlewskii* pattern (see [www.birdingfrontiers.com](http://www.birdingfrontiers.com)). Photographs in the hand and in the field showed that the Hartlepool bird displayed the diffuse pattern of white and grey typical of juvenile Western Orphean; since young birds do not replace the tail feathers (unless accidentally lost) until the post-breeding moult, when they are around 12 months old, it was accepted as a first-summer. In future, good photographs of the tail pattern may show which taxon is involved without the need for trapping.

Other plumage characters supporting identification as Western Orphean included the unmarked, warm orange-buff undertail-coverts typical of *hortensis*, whereas the eastern races show diffuse grey-brown centres to the undertail-coverts with broad, whitish fringes. Furthermore, the upper flanks and underwing-coverts (hidden below the closed wing but visible in some of the in-hand images) were washed peachy-buff, typical of Western Orphean; these are usually whitish in Eastern Orphean. Identification as Western Orphean was reinforced by the bird's bill length of 16.5 mm, falling below that of the three eastern races. The combination of these characters satisfied the Committee that this bird was a first-summer of the nominate race. Although it was suspected to be a male, this was not established beyond doubt.

Slack (2009) summarised recent records of Western Orphean Warbler to the north of the European breeding range, which include Germany (four records involving six individuals), Switzerland (1), the Netherlands (1), and Ouessant in northwest France (1). Of the six British records of Orphean Warbler, only this year's bird and one trapped at Portland, Dorset, on 20th



September 1955 have been accepted as Western Orphean, which breeds in southwest Europe. It has not been possible to assign any of the four remaining birds to a particular race, but as yet there is no evidence to suggest that Eastern Orphean Warbler has reached Britain. But with two records of *crassirostris* from Norway, in October 2004 (Mjølunes *et al.* 2006) and August 2006 (Olsen *et al.* 2008), there is a real possibility that Eastern Orphean Warbler could reach Britain.

(Nominate race breeds N Africa from Morocco to NW Libya, N through Iberian Peninsula to S France, S Switzerland & Italy. Winters sub-Saharan Africa from S Mauritania & N Senegal to Chad. Race *crassirostris* breeds Slovenia & Croatia S to Greece, & E through Turkey to Armenia, also NE Libya & Israel. Winters Sudan to Eritrea. Race *jerdoni* breeds from S Caspian Sea region in Iran to Pakistan & Afghanistan & N to Tien Shan Mountains in SE Kazakhstan. Winters Arabian Peninsula to peninsular India E to Bihar.)

## Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* (0, 11, 1)

Kent Samphire Hoe CP, 18th November, photo (R. Card, J. Lees).

Found by two volunteer rangers at Samphire Hoe, one of whom thankfully had a camera in his pocket, this bird was later identified with certainty by Paul Holt from the photos.

(Breeds N Caspian Sea through deserts of C Asia to Mongolia & NW China, & N Iran. Winters deserts & arid regions from NE Africa, through Arabian Peninsula to Pakistan & NW India.)

## Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda* (0, 6, 0)

2010 Gwent Bloreng, Abergavenny, first-summer male in song, 3rd–15th June, sound recording, photo, *Brit. Birds* 104: 599.

2001 Norfolk Scolt Head, male in song, 12th–18th May, *Brit. Birds* 95: 512.

2001 Suffolk Sizewell, male in song, 29th May, photo, *Brit. Birds* 95: 512.

1993 Borders St Abb's Head, first-summer male in song, 23rd–27th May, photo, *Brit. Birds* 87: 554.

1992 Yorkshire Spurn, adult male in song, 8th–9th June, trapped, photo, *Brit. Birds* 86: 513.

1982 Yorkshire Midhope Moor, adult male in song, 15th May to 24th July, photo, *Brit. Birds* 78: 575; 79: 572.

The review into records of this species commenced several years ago, as part of RIACT's work to determine which subspecies was involved in the British records. The pace of taxonomic change overtook the speed of our review, with Balearic Warbler *S. balearica* being awarded full species status by the BOURC Taxonomic Sub-committee (Sangster *et al.* 2012) ahead of BBRC completing its review (see BOU 2012). The review was complicated by the fact that the original submissions could not be located and alternative files had to be compiled from published accounts and photographs. As is so often the case with records that are subsequently reviewed to take account of taxonomic changes, the observers involved with the original sightings had not necessarily been concerned with the subspecies involved, and some of the accounts were not comprehensive in that regard. However, it was considered that the details provided were (just about) sufficient to assign all individuals to Marmora's Warbler, a logical outcome given this species' migratory behaviour in comparison with the sedentary Balearic Warbler. In future, any observer fortunate enough to locate a Marmora's Warbler in Britain should concentrate on size, plumage, bare-parts colour and vocalisations to ensure that Balearic is satisfactorily eliminated from the identification. A detailed assessment of the colour of the underparts and a comprehensive transcription of the call, or preferably a sound recording, will be fundamental to confirm the record. Shirihihi *et al.* (2001) is a key reference, and this is available online via the BB website.

(Breeds Corsica, Sardinia & small islands off W coast of Italy & N Tunisia. Winters N Algeria, Tunisia & Libya.)

## Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

### Southeast European race, 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. albistriata* (0, [41], 2)

Argyll Balephuil, Tiree, male, 28th May, photo (J. Bowler).

Fair Isle Lower Leogh and Observatory, first-summer female, 26th–27th May, trapped,



photo (W. T. S. Miles, J. Moss *et al.*).

**2011 Shetland** Kergord, Mainland, first-summer male, 29th May to 9th June, note revised dates, *Brit. Birds* 105: 598–599.

(Race *albistriata* breeds SE Europe from Slovenia & Croatia S to Greece, Aegean Islands, Crete & W Turkey. Migrates through Middle East to winter along S edge of Sahara S to Sudan.)

### **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola* (1, 46, 4)**

Cleveland Old Cemetery, Hartlepool, 26th September (T. Francis, R. C. Taylor *et al.*).

Co. Durham Whitburn CP, juvenile, 26th September, trapped, photo (A. George, M. V. Newsome *et al.*).

Fair Isle Utra, juvenile, 3rd October, trapped, photo (W. T. S. Miles, H. Mitchell, M. Smith *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Mains of Slains, Collieston, juvenile, 26th September, photo (P. Bloor, J. Wills *et al.*).

With nine records since the beginning of 2010, the current decade is on course to be by far the best for this Siberian skulker, and this is coupled with an increasing tendency for it to occur away from Shetland. There has never been a better time to try and find your own! The reasons for this increase are a little hazy, as the population is thought to be declining ([www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)) but an increase in observer numbers and a psychological acceptance that Shetland specialities can be found anywhere probably play their part. It can surely only be a matter of time before the far southwest or Wales get their first. This year's crop consisted of the first records for North-east Scotland and Cleveland, and the second for Co. Durham.

The sharp-eyed out there will have noticed that we are now ageing many trapped birds as juveniles. Although there may be some racial differences and individual variation, it does seem as though Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers undergo a complete post-juvenile moult when they reach their wintering grounds, or occasionally at a stopover site, and therefore migrate in their first autumn in full juvenile plumage (Kennerley & Pearson 2010).

(Breeds Siberia from Irtysh River E to Yakutia & Sea of Okhotsk, & SW Siberia & NE Kazakhstan through Mongolia to Ussuriland & N & NE China. Winters Sri Lanka & NE India to S China, & S throughout SE Asia.)

### **Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* (7, 124, 9)**

Fair Isle Da Water, juvenile, 23rd September, trapped, photo (N. J. Andrews, C. Fulcher, C. A. Holden *et al.*). Da Water and Charlie's Trees, juvenile, 26th September to 22nd October, trapped, photo (C. Gooddie, R. Harris, A. F. Mears, A. S. Rhodes *et al.*). Homisdale, juvenile, 2nd October, photo (J. A. Hopper *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 404).

Orkney Loch Gretchen, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 26th September, photo (M. Warren *et al.*). Nesstoun, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 17th October, trapped, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).

Shetland Bruray, Out Skerries, juvenile, 21st September, photo (M. J. McKee, M. F. Walford). Skaw, Whalsay, juvenile, 25th September, trapped, photo (J. L. Irvine, B. Marshall, P. Stronach *et al.*). Melby, Mainland, juvenile, 27th–29th September, photo (R. M. Tallack *et al.*) (plate 359).



Rory Tallack

**359.** Juvenile Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*, Melby, Shetland, September 2012.



Yorkshire Long Nab, Burniston, 12th October (C. G. Bradshaw).

Lanceolated Warblers continue to occur at a decent rate but nine records in a year makes 2012 the best ever. Three in a year on Fair Isle is not unexpected, while the Shetland records from Out Skerries and Whalsay are not too surprising either. The bird at Melby, in the farthest reaches of the West Mainland, highlights the potential of other parts of Shetland, and perhaps more will be found in such outposts in the coming years. However, the Yorkshire bird was only the third for that county, following records from Filey in 1994 and Spurn in 1996. The huge disparity between Shetland and the rest of Britain is still striking, even nearby Orkney has attracted just five birds in the BBRC era, including the two in 2012. With 115 records, Fair Isle and Shetland together still account for around 82% of British records.

A small number of singing males reach Finland every year but it remains uncertain just how many pairs there are in the adjacent parts of European Russia. Considering that, in recent years, the number of singing birds found in Finland has declined, it may be that our birds originate from farther east.

(Singing males regular SE Finland. To E, discontinuously from C Urals E to Kamchatka, Kuril Islands, Hokkaido & NE China. Winters Indian subcontinent, from Nepal E through NE India to SE Asia & Philippines.)

### **River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis* (0, 40, 2)**

Fair Isle Steensi Geo then Observatory, 11th–14th June and 23rd June to 15th July, trapped, photo (W. T. S. Miles, J. Moss *et al.*). Observatory, first-winter female, 11th–16th September, found dead on last date, trapped, photo, specimen in the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh (W. T. S. Miles, C. Round *et al.*).

(Breeds C & E Europe from Germany to C Finland & Croatia, E through Ukraine & C Russia to W Siberia. Migrates through Middle East & NE Africa to winter E Africa.)

### **Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* (–, 607, 5)**

Devon Topsham, Exe Estuary, male in song, 11th–23rd June, sound recording (M. Elcoate, J. Waldon *et al.*).

Hertfordshire Wilstone Resr, male in song, 20th–21st May, sound recording (R. A. Hargreaves, I. Williams *et al.*).

Leicestershire & Rutland Rutland Water, male in song, 4th–8th May, photo (S. M. Lister, J. Wright *et al.*).

Norfolk Strumpshaw Fen RSPB, male in song, 4th–20th May (B. Lewis *et al.*).

Suffolk Westwood Marsh, Walberswick, male in song, 12th May (B. J. Small).

2011 Hampshire Titchfield Haven, male in song, 15th April (B. S. Duffin); presumed same 24th April (R. K. Levett, T. J. Viney).

2011 Kent Location withheld, three, males in song, 25th May to 27th June, photo (observer details withheld).

(Nominate race breeds Iberia N to S Scandinavia, & E through E Europe, Russia & Ukraine to Black Sea coasts, & winters W Africa from Senegal to N Nigeria. Eastern race *fusca* breeds C Asia to NW China & W Mongolia, & winters NE Africa.)

### **Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata* (1, 127, 6)**

Devon Slapton Ley, 13th October (D. A. Cope).

Isles of Scilly Cove Vean, St Agnes, first-winter, 20th October, photo (P. R. French *et al.*).

Norfolk Burnham Overy Staithe, 23rd–26th September, photo (T. J. Benton *et al.*).

Orkney Westness, North Ronaldsay, first-winter, 16th August, trapped, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).

Shetland Sumburgh Head, Mainland, first-winter, 18th–20th August, photo (H. R. Harrop, J. Wood *et al.*) (plate 360). Clibberswick, Unst, first-winter, 27th September, photo (M. A. Maher, B. H. Thomason *et al.*).

As a breeding bird, the Booted Warbler has spread from European Russia into Finland, initially with one or more singing males taking up territories in the east of the country. From the first



confirmed breeding there in 2000, the population has increased to perhaps as many as 30 pairs <http://atlas3.lintuatlas.fi/results/species/booted%20warbler>. Nonetheless, over the last ten years, British sightings have materialised at a fairly constant rate. During 1993–2002, there were 53 records, while in 2003–12 some 47 were found. Given the continued increase in records of truly skulking species such as Lanceolated and Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers, that might be interpreted as a real decline in the face of increasing observer



Hugh Harrop

**360.** First-winter Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata*, Sumburgh, Shetland, August 2012.

awareness. Mind you, the identification of Booted Warbler has suddenly become much more complicated with the split of Sykes's Warbler *I. rama* (see *Ibis* 144: 707–710), meaning that birders must strive for good views and excellent notes on any *Iduna* that they are lucky enough to find. The key characters have been well covered in the birding press, and the Committee will rely heavily on photographs and accurate descriptions of those characters.

(Breeds E Finland, E to C Russia & W Siberia to Yenisey valley, C & N Kazakhstan to W Mongolia & W Xinjiang province, China. Winters N & peninsular India, S to Karnataka.)

### **Sykes's Warbler *Iduna rama* (0, 14, 2)**

Isles of Scilly Old Grimsby, Tresco, 5th–6th October, photo (R. A. Filby per Isles of Scilly Recorder) (plate 361). Shetland Braidfit and Ham, Foula, adult, 23rd–29th September, photo (A. Grieve *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 405).

(Breeds S Kazakhstan to W Xinjiang province, NW China, S locally to Persian Gulf states, Iran, Afghanistan & N Pakistan. Winters N & W India, occasionally S to N Sri Lanka.)



Richard Stonier

**361.** Sykes's Warbler *Iduna rama*, Tresco, Scilly, October 2012.



Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida* (0, 17, 1)



Dave Barnes

**362.** First-winter Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*, Kilminning, Fife, October 2012.

Fife Kilminning, first-winter, 14th October to 21st November, photo (B. Allan *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 428; plate 362).

Scotland accounts for 50% of all British records of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler so the 2012 record fits in nicely with this pattern. Shetland has three, the same as Fair Isle, Scilly and Portland Bill (Dorset). With a total of nine records in Scotland and six from

southwest England, it would seem that anywhere in between ought to be in with a chance, but in fact there are just single records from Yorkshire, Suffolk and Kent. Records are spread from May to mid November, and this year's was the latest on record. Up to the end of 2007, Slack (2009) noted records from the following European countries: Finland (3), Sweden (3), Denmark (1), Norway (1), Iceland (1), Germany (3), Austria (3), Belgium (1) and France (3). In comparison, Western Olivaceous Warbler *I. opaca* is almost unknown north of its breeding range, with just one record of a trapped bird in Sweden, in September 1993, and three from France (where there are also two records of indeterminate birds).

(Race *elaieca* breeds Balkans & Greece E to Turkey, S Caucasus, S Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran & N Afghanistan. Migrates through Middle East to winter E Africa. Other races breed North Africa, some wintering to S of breeding range.)

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* (1, 82, 5)

Cornwall Church Cove, first-winter, 8th–13th October, photo (P. J. Smale, N. Westwater *et al.*).



Steve Arlow

**363.** First-winter Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*, Fair Isle, September 2012.



Fair Isle Plantation, 30th June to 11th July, trapped, photo (J. Moss *et al.*). Setter and Boini Mire, first-winter, 24th September to 1st October, photo (P. F. Cook, G. K. Gordon *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 406; plate 363).

Orkney Holland House, North Ronaldsay, 9th–10th June, trapped, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).

Sussex Pagham Harbour RSPB, adult, 30th January to 2nd March, photo (I. M. Lang, O. Mitchell *et al.*).

(Breeds Black Sea coast from N Bulgaria & Danube delta E to Ukraine. To E, breeds widely across steppes of S Russia & SW Siberia, Kazakhstan, NW China & W Mongolia, S to Uzbekistan & N Pakistan. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent.)

### Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (9, 120, 16)

Cambridgeshire Ferry Meadows CP, first-winter, 23rd November, photo (R. Norris per birding information services).

Fair Isle Schoolton, first-winter, 22nd September to 1st October, photo (P. F. Cook *et al.*).

Observatory, first-winter, 29th September, trapped, photo (I. Cowgill, J. Moss, K. Snell *et al.*).

Walli Burn, first-winter, 11th October (G. K. Gordon, W. T. S. Miles *et al.*).

Highland Longman Landfill, Inverness, first-winter, 21st October, trapped, photo (K. Cuthbert, S. Foster *et al.*).

Lothian Barns Ness, first-winter, 28th September, photo (L. Berry, D. Woodhead).

Norfolk Warham Greens, male in song, 9th June, sound recording (J. Taylor *et al.*).

Northumberland St Mary's, Whitley Bay, first-winter, 12th–13th October, photo (A. Curry, N. P. Dales, I. Fisher *et al.*).

Orkney Sanday, first-winter, 21st September, photo (M. Lewis *et al.*).

Shetland Hillsgarth, Baltasound, Unst, first-winter, 21st September, photo (R. J. Brookes, M. A. Maher, B. H. Thomason). Hametoun, Foula, first-winter, 22nd September to 2nd October, photo (D. Brown, P. R. French, K. B. Shepherd *et al.*). Baltasound, Unst, first-winter, 23rd September (M. A. Maher, M. G. Pennington). Skaw, Whalsay, first-winter, 24th September, trapped (J. L. Irvine, B. Marshall). Ham, Foula, first-winter, 25th September, photo (W. C. Aspin, D. Brown, P. R. French, G. Thomas *et al.*). Halligarth, Unst, first-winter, 26th–29th September, photo (P-A. Crochet, M. A. Maher, B. H. Thomason *et al.*). Dale of Walls, Mainland, first-winter, 12th October, photo (R. M. Tallack, H. Towll).

(Breeds S Finland, Baltic countries & European Russia E through C Siberia to Lake Baikal & upper Lena River, & S through W Mongolia & NW China, Kazakhstan & Tajikistan to N Pakistan. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent S to Sri Lanka & E to NW Burma.)

### Great Reed Warbler

#### *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (7, 243, 8)

Avon Weston SE, Weston-super-Mare, male in song, 19th May to 2nd June (M. Ponsford *et al.*) (plate 364).

Dorset Radipole Lake RSPB, male in song, 22nd–24th May, photo (S. J. Wright *et al.*).

Norfolk Cley Marshes NWT, male in song, 30th May, photo (T. C. Davies, M. Golley, R. Millington *et al.*).

Shetland Cunningsburgh, Mainland, male in song, 26th–27th June, sound recording (P. M. Ellis, J. Nicolson). Boddam, Mainland, 28th June (G. F. Bell, R. M. Fray, T. Murphy). Norwick, Unst, first-winter, 22nd September, photo (M. A. Maher, M. G. Pennington *et al.*). Rerwick, Mainland, 5th October, photo (M. R. Eade *et al.*).

Sussex Pett Level and Icklesham, male in song,



James Packer

364. Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, Weston-super-Mare, Avon, May 2012.



2nd–4th May, sound recording (I. D. Hunter, P. Jones).

(Breeds throughout much of continental Europe from Iberia to Greece, N to S Sweden & S Finland, & E across S Russia, Turkey & Caucasus to W Siberia. C Asian race *zarudnyi* breeds from Volga to NW China & W Mongolia. Winters throughout C & S Africa.)

### Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* (0, 26, 1)

Kent Samphire Hoe CP, 10th March, photo (P. Holt *et al.*).

This is a rare example of a non-trapped Short-toed Treecreeper being accepted. Call was critical in two respects: it was the means by which the bird was picked up in the first place, but was also the main reason that the record was accepted. The call was well described and emphasises the fact that good written descriptions still have their place. As a small sop to those more senior bird-watchers who know that their hearing is not what it was, one of the observers was able to hear the Short-toed while Eurasian Treecreeper *C. familiaris* is now out of his hearing range. An in-built rarity filter!

(Mostly resident S Spain N to Denmark & E to Poland, W Ukraine & Greece. Elsewhere, resident in mountains of N Africa, W Turkey & W Caucasus.)

### Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

#### North European race, 'Black-bellied Dipper' *C. c. cinclus* (–, [12], 2)

Norfolk Thetford, 6th November into 2013, photo (per birding information services) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plates 51, 365).

Shetland Gulberwick, Mainland, 3rd–16th November, photo (L. Dalziel, A. Ockenden *et al.*)

1999 Shetland Voe, Mainland, 18th–20th March (P. V. Harvey, N. Milligan *et al.*).

1986 Fair Isle Wirvie, 26th March, trapped, photo (M. G. Pennington, N. J. Riddiford, A. Whittaker *et al.*).

1985 Fair Isle Gully, 1st–4th April, trapped, photo (P. V. Harvey, N. J. Riddiford, K. B. Shepherd *et al.*).

1984 Fair Isle Gully, 9th–15th April, trapped, photo (P. V. Harvey, K. Osborn, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*).

We publish here a few more historical records to add to the database, but still not enough to lose the square brackets from the statistics above. We have received an overview of records from Norfolk, where there were many claims from the mid 1960s to 1990s, but, other than two records



Mike Lawrence

365. 'Black-bellied Dipper' *Cinclus. c. cinclus*, Thetford, Norfolk, January 2013.



from Leicestershire & Rutland, nothing has come in from areas outside the hotspots of Norfolk and Shetland. We are very grateful to observers willing to provide documentation for historical records and for these we require a description that was taken at the time, preferably supported by photographs. Contrary to the comment in a previous report (*Brit. Birds* 104: 606), we shall *not* limit acceptance to those birds that show only a black lower breast and belly. A reasonable proportion of nominate *cinclus* show brown feathering, particularly at the border with the white breast, as many observers who travelled to see the wintering bird at Thetford last winter will appreciate. However, we do need to be convinced that the extent of brown is in keeping with the nominate form.

(Breeds Scandinavia, Baltic countries & W Russia. Outside the breeding season, resident or dispersive to S & W of breeding range.)

### **White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma* (27, 47, 2)**

Northumberland Inner Farne, first-winter, 24th September, photo (G. Duncan, W. J. Scott *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Creachan, Breibhig, Barra, first-winter, 13th October, trapped, photo (M. Oksien, C. D. Scott *et al.*).

(Race *aurea* breeds European Urals & E across Siberia from Yenisey River to Ussuriland, S to N Mongolia, extreme NE China, Korean Peninsula & Japan. Winters widely across S China, Taiwan & S Japan to Indochina & C Thailand. Nominate race resident or altitudinal migrant in Himalayas, SW China & Taiwan.)

### **Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* (0, 29, 2)**

Outer Hebrides Northbay House, Morgan, Barra, first-winter, 2nd–3rd October, photo (S. L. Rivers *et al.*); presumed same Creachan, Breibhig, Barra, 4th October, trapped, photo (M. Oksien, C. D. Scott *et al.*).

Shetland Da Loch, Foula, 23rd September, photo (D. Brown *et al.*).

(Breeds S Alaska & Canada E to S Labrador & Newfoundland, S to N California, New Mexico, Great Lakes & West Virginia. Migrates across E USA to winter from Mexico S to NW Argentina.)

### **Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* (0, 52, 1)**

Isles of Scilly Troy Town, St Agnes, 6th–8th October, photo (L. Pitcher *et al.*).

(Breeds extreme NE Siberia, & E through Alaska & N Canada to Labrador & Newfoundland. Migrates across E USA to winter N South America.)

### **Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* (0, 19, 1)**

Shetland Harrier, Foula, 13th October (K. Gibb, M. A. Wilkinson).

(Breeds Siberia from Yenisey River E to Sea of Okhotsk & Kamchatka, & S to Lake Baikal, N Mongolia & Amurland. Winters S China, Taiwan, Indochina & Thailand S to Singapore, Sumatra, Philippines & N Borneo.)

### **Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis* (2, 68, 2)**

Fair Isle Hill Dyke, Vaadal and Barkland, first-winter male, 6th October, photo (A. Close, W. T. S. Miles *et al.*).

Shetland Freester, South Nesting, Mainland, first-winter male, 1st December, photo (D. Coutts, I. Sandison).

(Breeds C & N Urals, E across W Siberia & E Kazakhstan to NW China. Winters Iraq to N India, E through Himalayan foothills to Bhutan.)

### **Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* (1, 188, 6)**

Fair Isle Gully and Observatory, first-summer, 20th–22nd May, trapped, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 231). Gilsetter, first-summer, 25th May, trapped, photo (P. Cottam, W. T. S. Miles, J. Moss *et al.*). Gully and Observatory, first-winter, 24th–26th August, trapped, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).

Isle of May Observatory, first-summer, 19th May, trapped, photo (M. Martin, N. Morrison *et*



John Anderson



**366.** Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*, Isle of May, June 2012.

*al.*). Main Light, male, 30th May to 2nd June, trapped, photo (M. Oksien, B. Orr, C. D. Scott *et al.*) (plate 366).

Norfolk Weybourne, male in song, 13th May, trapped, photo (N. Rogers, M. Taylor).

2008 Isle of May Observatory, 19th August, trapped, photo (N. Morrison, G. Mortimer).

(Breeds C & E Europe from S Scandinavia & Baltic countries to Romania & Ukraine, & E through temperate Russia to S Siberia. Winters E Africa, from S Kenya to Zimbabwe.)

### Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* (0, 8, 1)

Fair Isle Schoolton and Haa, female, 23rd October to 3rd November, photo (N. J. Riddiford *et al.*).

Continuing the recent upsurge in the fortunes of this species, the fourth for Fair Isle (see fig. 4, p. 636) was discovered towards the end of the established arrival period, between 5th and 26th October. By remaining on the island for 12 days, this bird was just one day short of last year's long-stay record holder, in Shetland. Many birders will hope that this trend continues, and that the next long-stayer chooses somewhere on mainland Britain.

(Breeds European foothills of Ural Mountains, & Siberia from Ob River E to Anadyr & Kamchatka, & S to N Mongolia, Ussuriland, NE Hokkaido & NE China, also isolated population on E slopes of Tibetan Plateau. Winters from Nepal E through Himalayan foothills to NE India, Burma & N Indochina to C Thailand, S China & Taiwan.)

### Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* (2, 110, 3)

Andy Thompson



**367.** First-winter Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*, Stiffkey, Norfolk, October 2012.

Norfolk Stiffkey, first-winter, 22nd–24th October, photo (M. Sidwell *et al.* per Norfolk Recorder) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 429; plate 367).

Outer Hebrides Uigen, Lewis, first-winter, 31st March to 7th April, trapped, photo (C. M. Reynolds *et al.*).

Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, first-winter, 27th September, trapped, photo (J. Dunn, J. L. Irvine, B. Marshall).

(Breeds NE Finland E through boreal forests of N Russia & Siberia to Kamchatka, N Japan & NE China. Winters S China, Taiwan & S Japan through SE Asia to N peninsular Thailand.)



**Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* (1, 35, 0)**

2010 Yorkshire Spurn, first-winter, 30th August to 1st September, trapped, DNA analysis, photo (M. Garner, A. A. Hutt, M. J. Pilsworth *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 104: plate 257).

Female and first-winter Collared Flycatchers have a track record of being difficult for BBRC. There is just a handful of previously accepted records, all involving birds that have shown clearly the requisite plumage features, even involving samples of the nape feathers in some cases. The Spurn bird is certainly the most challenging individual that has been accepted by the Committee so far and the observers involved deserve particular credit for persevering with their suspicions regarding the bird's identification.

In the hand, this bird drew the attention of Mike Pilsworth and Adam Hutt as a result of the long wing length (86 mm). They contacted Paul Collin and Martin Garner to suggest that the bird was worth coming to see. The pattern of white at the base of the primaries and the tail pattern further raised suspicions that the bird could be a Collared Flycatcher, but in one of the most difficult plumages. Although other features supported this, the bird did not show the diagnostic pattern on the nape feathers and there was some doubt that it would ever be possible to confirm the identification. Fortunately, Mike and Adam had the foresight to collect the few belly feathers that were dislodged during the ringing process, and these proved instrumental in confirming the identification.

We are extremely grateful to Prof. Holger Schielzeth from Bielefeld University, Germany, for his analysis of the DNA results, and to Martin Collinson for helping the Committee's interpretation of that analysis. In summary, four microsatellite alleles demonstrated that the sample from the Spurn bird was compatible with diagnostic Collared alleles, eliminating Pied *F. hypoleuca* and first-generation Pied × Collared hybrids, and ruling out 75% of second-generation Collared × (Collared × Pied) hybrids. So, after pending our decision to wait for these results, we were ultimately able to accept the record.

Several members of BBRC remain uncomfortable with relying on the emerging development of molecular investigation to support the identification of such birds, particularly where the phenotypic documentation is supportive but not conclusive. This is understandable, given that members are selected principally for their field-identification skills, rather than their ability to interpret molecular evidence derived from laboratory studies. Nonetheless, we have to remain open to all the forms of evidence and analysis that support the identification process. By piecing all these elements together, it helps our understanding of phenotypic variability and may help us to confirm identification criteria that are currently only tentative.

(Breeds E France, S Germany, Italy & Baltic islands of Gotland & Öland, E through C & E Europe to European Russia W of Urals. Winters E & C Africa, from Tanzania to Zimbabwe.)

**Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* (1, 347, 10)**

Devon Bolt Head, 27th–30th October, photo (A. Doidge per Devon Recorder).

Dorset Portland Bill, first-winter male, 24th–26th October, trapped, DNA analysis, photo (M. Cade, N. Urch *et al.*).

Essex Southend-on-Sea, male, 29th–30th October, photo (D. Hymen).

Herefordshire Wellington GP, 27th–30th October, photo (P. H. & T. Downes *et al.*).

Kent Dumpton Gap, 27th September, photo (K. Ross *et al.*).

Norfolk Eccles-on-Sea, first-winter male, 21st October, photo (T. E. Allwood, L. Davison, A. J. Kane *et al.*).

Shetland Hoswick, Mainland, first-winter male, 27th September to 8th October, photo (N. P. Roberts, A. Saunders *et al.*). Housay, Out Skerries, first-winter male, 1st October, photo (P. Forrest, M. J. McKee, C. J. Turner). Norwick, Unst, first-winter, 29th October, photo (R. J. Brookes).

Sussex Birling Gap, 20th–23rd October, photo (R. J. Fairbank, M. Kenefick, J. W. King *et al.*).

Genetic evidence indicates that the Portland bird is the first confirmed record of *S. m. stejnegeri* for Britain. This record has been accepted as such by BBRC, and passed to BOURC, who will



consider formally its admission to the British List. This follows similar evidence to confirm that the nominate form was involved in a pre-BBRC-era British record (BOU 2012; Collinson & McGowan 2012). For a number of years, *stejnegeri* was part of the British List on the basis of an adult male seen at Cley, Norfolk in May 1972 (BOURC 7th Checklist), but was demoted after it became clear that field identification is at best problematic. The dark, heavily saturated plumage hues of the Dorset individual alerted sharp-eyed observers in eastern Asia to the possibility that this form was involved. This reinforced the suspicion of several observers and BBRC members that it may be possible to assign individuals to this form based on plumage. However, further studies are required to confirm a suite of characters that will enable these suspicions to develop to the point where such richly coloured late autumn arrivals can be confirmed as being of the more eastern form.

(Race *maurus* breeds Russia & W Siberia E to Yenisey River and region of Irkutsk, NW Mongolia & N China, S to Tien Shan Mountains, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Winters Iran to N India. Race *stejnegeri* breeds east of *maurus*, from Baikal region E to Pacific coast of Amurland, S to NE China, Sakhalin, Hokkaido & N Honshu. Winters NE India & China S of Yangtze, S to Malay Peninsula, Philippines & Borneo. Other races occur in Caspian Sea region, Himalayas & W China.)

### **Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* (2, 62, 2)**

**Northumberland** Holy Island, first-winter male, 14th October, photo (S. Rippon *et al.*).

**Shetland** Quendale, Mainland, first-winter male, 23rd October, photo (G. F. Bell); presumed same Virkie, Mainland, 24th October, photo (W. T. S. Miles, J. Moss, R. Riddington).

(Breeds E Romania & Bulgaria, E though S & E Ukraine, S Russia, S Siberia, Kazakhstan & Mongolia to N China, E to Gulf of Bohai. Winters NE & E Africa, & SW Arabian Peninsula.)

### **Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* (11, 46, 1)**

**Lincolnshire** Frampton Marsh RSPB, first-summer female *O. h. hispanica*, 12th June, photo (P. A. Sullivan) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plate 291).

(Mediterranean basin; nominate race breeds NW Africa & Iberia, E to France & N Italy, eastern race *melanoleuca* breeds S Italy to Greece, & SW Asia from Turkey to S Caucasus, S to Israel & SW Iran. Winters N tropical Africa from Senegal & N Nigeria to Ethiopia & Eritrea.)

### **Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (9, 118, 5)**

**Essex** Abberton Resr, female, 28th October to 5th November, photo (per birding information services).

**Flintshire** Rhyl, female, 23rd–26th November, photo (L. J. Clark, A. Cumberlidge, R. Sandham *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plate 52).

**Kent** Swale NNR, male, 18th November, photo (P. Knox, G. Maddison, A. Quinn *et al.*).

**North-east Scotland** Rattray Head, female, 2nd December into 2013, photo (I. Hartshorne, A. Painting *et al.*).

**Northumberland** Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, male, 4th December 2011 to 3rd January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 609–610.

**Sussex** Worthing, first-winter male, 24th–26th October, photo (W. Reid *et al.* per Sussex Recorder).

**Yorkshire** Bempton Cliffs, first-winter male, 19th November 2011 to 9th February, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 609–610.

**2011 Anglesey** North Stack, Holyhead, male, 26th November, photo (F. M. Lehman).

Late-autumn arrivals and extended stays are the norm for this attractive and often very confiding wheatear, while spring birds are very rare – just seven since 1950. A glance through the statistics reveals some notable influxes and fluctuating numbers – including 17 in 1997 (but just three in 1998), ten in 2003 (but just one the following year) and 13 in 2011.

Records are rather evenly spread along the south and east coasts with Norfolk and Kent attracting the most. Interestingly, it also has the best inland track record for any of the vagrant wheatears, with Greater Manchester, Staffordshire, Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Herefordshire



and Greater London all getting in on the act. For the beachcombing birder, a beach or seafront just about anywhere in Britain in late October and early November could produce one of these dapper chats.

(Breeds desert regions of N Africa from Morocco to Middle East, N to S Caucasus, & C Asia from C Iran & N Pakistan to Mongolia & N China. Some N African birds resident, but most winter Sahara & Sahel region of N Africa from Mauritania E to Ethiopia & Somalia. Asian breeders winter Arabian Peninsula to NW India.)

### Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (0, 8, 2)

Hampshire Calshot, male, 3rd December 2011 to 23rd March, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 610 (*Brit. Birds* 105: plates 101, 138 & 359).

Isle of Wight Newchurch, male, 4th–6th November, photo (J. Gloyn *et al.*).

Suffolk Landguard, male, 24th August to 27th September, photo (P. J. Holmes, E. Marsh, J. Richardson *et al.*) (plate 368).

(Breeds Cape Verde, Canary Islands & NW Africa, N to Iberian Peninsula, Sardinia, Balkans E to SW Asia, E through C Asia to E Kazakhstan, NW China & S to Afghanistan. European breeders mainly resident, C Asian breeders migratory, wintering NE Africa, Arabian Peninsula & Iran to NW India.)



John Richardson

368. Male Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*, Landguard, Suffolk, August 2012.

### Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

#### Central Mediterranean race, 'Ashy-headed Wagtail' *M. f. cinereocapilla* ([1], [5], 0)

1983 Yorkshire Thrybergh Resr, Rotherham, male, 17th April (P. Leonard, A. Roadhouse *et al.*).

This is only the sixth British record of Ashy-headed Wagtail to be accepted, with a further four accepted as intergrade Ashy-headed/Spanish Wagtail *M. f. iberiae*. Spanish Wagtail apart, Ashy-headed Wagtail is most likely to be mistaken for white-throated examples of Grey-headed Wagtail *M. f. thunbergi*. However, many claims of Ashy-headed Wagtail in Britain fail to make the grade because the call is not recorded or described, which is essential to eliminate Grey-headed. The southern taxa, Ashy-headed, Spanish and Black-headed Wagtail *M. f. feldegg*, give a distinctively harsh call with a marked 'r' sound, *tsreep* or similar, quite distinct from the *pseeu* call of the western subspecies, including Grey-headed (Alström & Mild 2003). Date can be indicative of Ashy-headed, with most discovered here in mid April (coinciding with the main arrival of Yellow Wagtails *M. f. flavissima*), before the typical arrival period of Grey-headed Wagtails in eastern Britain in late April and May.

The recent discovery of apparent Ashy-headed Wagtails breeding in the coastal marshes of Morocco, south of Agadir and to the south of the range of Spanish Wagtails in Morocco (van den Berg 2011), has presented some interesting challenges that might affect British claims. This has



resulted in the Dutch committee for avian systematics (CSNA) revising its previous position on this pair, formerly treated as two distinct phylogenetic species (Sangster *et al.* 1998). This revision has seen Ashy-headed and Spanish Wagtails being combined within a broader *M. cinereocapilla*, which has been renamed the 'White-throated Wagtail', of which there are three accepted records in the Netherlands (Bot *et al.* 2012). This change seems sensible when dealing with such morphologically variable taxa, where differences are slight and can overlap, even on the breeding grounds, but which share similar distinctive vocalisations. BBRC will continue to follow BOURC's taxonomic approach, but our consideration of intergrades (so-called 'Southern Wagtails') will enable us to monitor the occurrence patterns of all 'White-throated Wagtails' in Britain and we continue to encourage observers to submit contemporary and historical claims for consideration.

(Breeds Sardinia, Italy, Sicily, SW Slovenia, NW Croatia, also SW Morocco, intergrading with *iberiae* in S France & NE Spain. Winters WC Africa from Mali to Nigeria, E to Lake Chad.)

### **Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava***

#### ***M. f. cinereocapilla* x *iberiae* (0, 4, 0)**

2008 Denbighshire Conwy RSPB, male, 28th–30th April, photo (M. Hughes, R. Sandham *et al.*).

### **Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (0, 263, 18)**

Argyll Loch a'Phuill, Tiree, first-winter, 27th–29th September, photo (N. Welden *et al.*).

Caernarfonshire Bardsey, first-winter, 10th–11th October, photo (D. Waudby *et al.*).

Fair Isle Utra and other sites, two, first-winters, 14th–15th August, one to 16th, photo (J. Moss *et al.*). Easter Lothar Water, first-winter, 25th August (D. Parnaby). Vaadal and Setter, first-winter, 21st September, photo (J. Dunn, J. Moss *et al.*). Gilsetter and South Harbour, first-winter, 5th October, photo (J. Ginnever, W. T. S. Miles, J. Moss *et al.*).

Isles of Scilly Carn Leh, Lower Moors and Porth Hellick, St Mary's, first-winter, 1st–18th September, photo (S. Perfect *et al.*). Salakee and Porth Hellick, St Mary's, first-winter, 1st–18th September, photo (K. A. Wilson *et al.*). Great Pool, Tresco, first-winter, 24th–26th September, photo (P. A. Dukes *et al.*).

Lothian Barns Ness, first-winter, 21st–22nd September, photo (N. Milligan).

Norfolk West Runton, male, 30th April, photo (I. Prentice *et al.*). Holme, male, 4th May, photo (per birding information services). Holme, first-winter, 14th November, photo (N. Pitts, D. Scott).

Orkney Loch of Garso, North Ronaldsay, first-winter, 12th–14th August, photo (R. J. Else *et al.*).

Shetland Haroldswick, Unst, first-winter, 17th August, photo (B. H. Thomason). Ham, Foula, first-winter, 31st August to 3rd September, photo (D. & G. Atherton).

Yorkshire Flamborough Head, first-summer male, 19th–20th May, photo (B. & C. Richards *et al.*) (plate 369).

The crop of 18 in 2012 is the third-highest annual total, behind 21 in 2008 and 20 in 2011. Added to 12 in 2009 and 14 in 2010, this trend suggests that the writing is on the wall for this species as a 'BB rarity'.

The 2012 records show many of the patterns of timing and distribution established since 1950. Half of the year's birds were seen on Fair Isle, Shetland and Scilly; these three recording areas have accounted for just over half of all records. This year's birds also included a couple between late April and mid May, followed by an autumn influx between mid August and mid October. Slack (2009) showed that the autumn arrival dates of Citrine Wagtails on Fair Isle are getting earlier. In 2012, a third of all birds arrived in August, and it is clear that birders need to be listening for that distinctive, rasping call as early as the second week of August.

Although the majority of individuals are fairly straightforward to identify, the elimination of eastern forms of Yellow Wagtails *M. flava* can be tricky, particularly with flyovers or those birds which are seen briefly. In addition, some recent claims have prompted members to discuss the possibility of hybrids being involved. As Citrine Wagtail expands its range into eastern Europe





Dave Mansell

**369.** First-summer male Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, Flamborough Head, Yorkshire, May 2012.

some may pair with Yellow Wagtails. The only British breeding record to date involved a male Citrine in a location where Yellow Wagtails were breeding nearby. However, the female was not seen so it was not established whether this involved a mixed pairing or a pair of Citrine Wagtails (Cox & Inskipp 1978). With this in mind, critical examination of the head and wing pattern plus details of any calls remain important for acceptance.

(Breeds Baltic countries, S Finland, Belarus, Ukraine & S Russia, E across N Siberia to Taimyr Peninsula & S to C Siberia; also C & E Turkey E to Kazakhstan, Mongolia & N China. Black-backed race *calcarata* breeds C Asia to Tibetan Plateau. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent, S China & SE Asia to peninsular Thailand.)

### **Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* (1, 375, 52)**

Cornwall Pendeen, 9th–12th October, photo (I. Kendall *et al.*). Mousehole, 23rd–24th October, photo (M. T. Elliott *et al.* per Cornwall Recorder).

Devon Lundy, 7th October (I. Lakin, K. Rylands).

Essex Gunners Park, Shoeburyness, 22nd–24th October, photo (T. Bourne, N. Chambers, P. M. Griggs, D. Petrie *et al.*).

Fair Isle Haa, 24th–29th September, photo (N. J. Andrews, C. Fulcher, C. A. Holden *et al.*). Pund and Setter, 27th–28th September, photo (N. J. Andrews, C. Fulcher, C. A. Holden *et al.*). Lower Leogh and Vaila's Trees, two, 11th October, one to 12th (I. R. Court, P. V. Irving, D. Parnaby, D. Steel *et al.*). Schoolton and other sites, 16th October, two on 17th, four on 18th, two on 19th–24th, one 25th–26th October, photo (W. T. S. Miles, J. Moss, D. Parnaby *et al.*).

Isles of Scilly English Island Point and Pool Green, St Martin's, 16th October (R. Filby, A. H. Pulsford, T. Vaughan *et al.*). Hillside Farm, Bryher, 19th–24th October (S. Arlow, R. M. R. James *et al.*).

Kent River Wantsum, Coldharbour, 21st October, photo (A., C. H. & M. Hindle *et al.*).

Norfolk Holme, 22nd October (C. & I. Fallows, G. Hibberd *et al.*); presumed same 24th October (G. Elton, A. Saunders *et al.*). Holkham Meals, 22nd–24th October (A. I. Bloomfield *et al.*). Overy Dunes, Holkham, 24th October (A. I. Bloomfield *et al.*). Holkham Meals, 25th–28th October (A. I. Bloomfield).

Northumberland Brownsman, Farne Islands, 12th October, photo (G. Duncan, J. Finch, C. R. Hatsell). Inner Farne, two, 23rd October, photo (W. J. Scott *et al.*).

Orkney Twingness, North Ronaldsay, 12th October (M. Warren *et al.*). Skelwick, Westray, 14th October, photo (D. & S. Otter). Holland House, North Ronaldsay, 22nd–23rd October, trapped, photo (R. J. Else *et al.*).

Shetland South Harrier, Foula, 24th September, photo (G. C. Taylor *et al.*). Punds, Foula, 26th



September to 1st October, photo (D. Brown, P. R. French *et al.*). Otterswick, Yell, 26th–28th September (R. J. Curtis). Quendale, Mainland, 27th September, photo (M. Garner, R. Riddington). Hestingott, Mainland, 27th September, photo (P. M. Ellis, K. D. Shaw *et al.*). Lower Voe, Mainland, 28th September (R. J. Irvine). North Collafirth, North Mainland, 13th October (M. S. Chapman). Quendale, 13th October (P. V. Harvey, M. A. Maher), presumed same Brake, 13th October, photo (C. Fentiman, D. H. Hatton, T. Wilson *et al.*). Haroldswick, Unst, 13th October, photo (M. G. Pennington). Lerwick, Mainland, 14th–16th October (R. J. Nason *et al.*). Tresta, Mainland, 14th–18th October, photo (R. M. Tallack, H. Towll). Hametoun, Foula, 14th–16th October (K. Gibb, M. A. Wilkinson *et al.*). Kergord, Mainland, 15th October (P. V. Harvey *et al.*). Scalloway, Mainland, 15th October (P. A. Harris, P. Sclater *et al.*). Mulla, Voe, Mainland, 16th October (M. S. Chapman). Skaw, Unst, 16th October (P. V. Harvey, B. H. Thomason). Baltasound, Unst, 18th–19th October, photo (B. H. & C. H. Thomason) (plate 330). Boddam, Mainland, 19th October, photo (I. S. Robertson). Fladdabister, Mainland, 19th–20th October, photo (G. W. Petrie *et al.*). Out Skerries, 21st October (S. Dunstan).

**Suffolk** Corton, 23rd–25th October, photo (J. Brown *et al.* per Suffolk Recorder).

**Yorkshire** Filey, 30th April, photo (M. J. Pearson). Flamborough Head, 22nd October, sound recording (R. Baines, P. Cunningham, J. O'Malley). Thorpe Marsh, 23rd October, photo (B. Foster). Spurn, 25th October (P. R. French, J. Taylor *et al.*). Sammy's Point, Easington, two, 27th October, photo (R. J. Swales, R. Taylor *et al.*).

**2011 Lincolnshire** Wroot, 13th October (M. McNaghten).

**2011 Shetland** Grutness, Mainland, 24th October, photo (G. W. Petrie *et al.*).

[Note: the post-1950 statistics have been reviewed and corrected since the 2011 BBRC report (*Brit. Birds* 105: 611).]

Removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2012, Olive-backed Pipit bows out with a record haul, the total of 52 eclipsing the previous best of 43 in 1990. Although the species was recorded only once before 1950, and it took until 1987 for the 50th bird in Britain to be logged, there has been an average of almost 15 birds a year in the quarter-century since then and at least eight every year since 2000.

Finding an OBP will still make the day a special one, especially away from a few recording areas or outside a narrow temporal window. More than half of the grand total is accounted for by the Northern Isles (Shetland, Fair Isle and Orkney, with 237 birds in total), while the 46 in Scilly, 36 in Yorkshire and 23 in Norfolk make for 80% of records from just six areas. Northumberland and Cornwall are the only other counties to have reached double figures, and the species is almost unknown away from eastern and southern coasts. In addition, 94% of all birds have been found between 21st September and 10th November. The spring bird from Filey, Yorkshire, in 2012 is only the 11th for that season (the first for Britain, on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, in 1948, was also in spring, although this was not to be identified until many years after its discovery).

Identification and record assessment of Olive-backed Pipits has been relatively straightforward, as the high acceptance rate in recent years shows. Plumage-wise, a classic, fresh OBP is distinctive, with its well-defined head pattern, faintly streaked olive mantle, sharply and contrastingly streaked underparts and bubblegum-pink legs. That said, observers claiming worn, dull birds do need to establish that they are aware of the pitfall of bright Tree Pipits *A. trivialis*. Most of the debate in terms of identification revolves around how distinctive the call is. Recordings and sonograms show that Olive-backed and Tree Pipits may have different calls, but the exact differences and limits are currently the subject of a study by The Sound Approach team. Magnus Robb (*in litt.*) has confirmed that there is still, in his opinion, 'an area of uncertainty', and even though he believes that 'it is possible to tell many OBPs by ear', it could be that there is some overlap and some birds may not be separable, even with recordings. Some recent submissions to BBRC do suggest that a little overconfidence about the diagnosability of the call may be creeping in (although no records were found not proven for this reason) and to the human ear the differences in the call are very subtle. Magnus suggests listening hard for a very short, inconspicuous *sip* call given by both species in flight, in combination with their usual flight call. In OBP, it is much higher-pitched than in Tree Pipit, allowing more confident identification if heard.



Examples of both species can be heard by following the link on the BBRC website, and we are most grateful to the Sound Approach team for making these recordings available.

(Race *yunnanensis* breeds N Urals E across C & E Siberia to N China, Kamchatka, Kuril Islands & Japan. Winters widely across S China, Taiwan & throughout N & C parts of SE Asia. Nominate race breeds Himalayas & mountains of WC China, wintering throughout Indian subcontinent.)

### **Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi* (4, 90, 3)**

Fair Isle Shirva, 1st–2nd October, photo (J. A. Hopper, W. T. S. Miles *et al.*).

Shetland Housay, Out Skerries, 21st September, photo (M. J. McKee, M. F. Walford). Norwick, Unst, 30th September to 2nd October, photo (M. G. Pennington *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 407).

(Breeds scrub-tundra & taiga of subarctic Eurasia, from Pechora region of NE Russia E to Chukotskiy Peninsula & Kamchatka. Migrates through E China & Taiwan to wintering areas in Philippines, N Borneo & N Sulawesi. Isolated race, *menzbieri*, breeds NE China & Amur River region of SE Russia.)

### **Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* (1, 26, 10)**

Argyll Ruaig, Tiree, 27th September, photo (J. Bowler, J. M. Dickson, N. Welden).

Berkshire Queen Mother Resr, 12th–25th December, then two from 26th into 2013, photo (M. J. McKee *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plates 82, 370).

Fair Isle Furse and Observatory, 29th September, photo (I. J. Andrews, J. Moss *et al.*).

Isles of Scilly Peninnis, St Mary's, 26th–29th September, photo (A. Gardener *et al.*). Peninnis Head and Airfield, St Mary's, 6th–11th October, photo (B. Dykes, I. Prentice *et al.*). Popplestone Bay, Bryher, 9th October, photo (D. & R. A. Filby, T. Vaughan), presumed same Stoneship Porth and Rushy Bay, Bryher, 19th–27th October, photo (S. Arlow *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Smerclate, South Uist, 21st–25th September, two on 26th, one or other remaining to 2nd October, photo (S. E. Duffield, J. B. Kemp).

Shetland Rerwick and Scousburgh, Mainland, 30th September to 4th October, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 408).

The ten records in 2012 comprise the highest annual total and maintain the increase referred to in last year's report. The species comment prompting observers to look for this species on their



Simon Stirrup

**370.** Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*, Queen Mother Reservoir, Berkshire, December 2012.



local reservoirs proved somewhat prescient, but the discovery of a second bird at Queen Mother Reservoir on Boxing Day was exceptional. It goes to show that occasionally, even well away from the coast, there may be new rarity revelations to reward those observers who persevere during the shortest days of the year.

All records refer to the North American race *rubescens*. The Asian race *japonicus* has not yet been recorded in Britain.

(North American race *rubescens* breeds W Greenland, N & NW Canada, & Alaska, winters W & S USA, Mexico & C America. Asian race *japonicus* breeds NE Siberia W to Baikal region, winters N Pakistan & NW India to S & E China, S Korea & S Japan.)

## **Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni***

### **Greenland race, 'Hornemann's Redpoll' *C. h. hornemanni* (12, 76, 30)**

Argyll Sanaigmore Bay, Islay, 10th April, photo (G. & H. Mackenzie).

Fair Isle Plantation, first-summer, 4th June, trapped, photo (W. T. S. Miles *et al.*). Observatory, 18th October, photo (D. Parnaby), presumed same Chapel and Burkle, 25th October (R. Rosser).

Isles of Scilly Back Lane, Tresco, 4th October, photo (E. Parnell).

Norfolk Holkham Meals, first-winter, 26th–27th October, photo (S. P. Dennis *et al.*).

Orkney Pierowall and Taftend, Westray, 6th–19th October, photo (J. Chester, D. & S. Otter, C. Parry). Biggings, Harray, adult female, 14th October, found dead, photo (A. J. Leitch, J. Logue, E. R. Meek). Holland House, North Ronaldsay, first-winter male, 17th–22nd October, trapped, photo (R. J. Else *et al.*). Holland, North Ronaldsay, 19th October, photo (A. Duncan, G. Woodbridge *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides On Lewis: Port of Ness, first-winter, 14th October, photo (B. A. E. Marr, R. Ruston), presumed same Europie, Ness, 16th October, photo (B. A. E. Marr, R. Ruston), Port of Ness, 29th October, photo (B. A. E. Marr), and Adabroc, Port of Ness, 3rd November, photo (D. MacDonald). Europie, Ness, 16th October, photo (B. A. E. Marr, R. Ruston), presumed same Butt of Lewis, 20th October, photo (B. A. E. Marr, R. Ruston), Port of Ness, 29th October, photo (B. A. E. Marr), and Adabroc, Port of Ness, 3rd November, photo (D. MacDonald).

Shetland Norwick, Unst, first-winter, 28th September to 11th October, photo (P-A. Crochet, M. A. Maher *et al.*). Bruray, Out Skerries, 5th October, photo (P. Forrest, M. J. McKee, C. J. Turner). Wurr Wick, Foula, adult male, 16th October, photo (K. Gibb, M. A. Wilkinson). Vat-shoull, Whalsay, 18th–22nd October, photo (B. Marshall). Ellister, Maywick, Mainland, 27th October, photo (H. R. Harrop, M. Sutherland). Baltasound, Unst, 30th October to 2nd November, photo (R. J. Brookes, M. G. Pennington); five first-winters, 4th–9th November, four remaining to 27th, three to 1st December then one to 17th December, photo (M. G. Pennington *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plate 53); and one, 5th–7th November, photo (M. G. Pennington, B. H. Thomason). Isbister, North Roe, two, first-winters, 4th November, photo (M. S. Chapman *et al.*). Uyeasound, Unst, two, 11th–18th November, one remaining to 2nd December, photo (B. H. Thomason *et al.*); third individual, first-winter, 18th November to 2nd December, photo (P. V. Harvey, M. G. Pennington). Norwick, Unst, first-winter, 29th November to 2nd December, photo (R. J. Brookes, J. Nangle, M. G. Pennington).

Suffolk Aldeburgh, first-winter, 8th–19th December, photo (C. Barley, L. G. Woods *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plates 83, 371).

[Note: the post-1950 statistics have been reviewed and corrected since the 2011 BBRC report (*Brit. Birds* 105: 614).]

The accolade of the largest redpoll in the world belongs to this splendid taxon. With a core range in the high-Arctic regions of Greenland and Canada, it is also one of the most difficult to see. Five birds on Fair Isle in autumn 1905 demonstrate invasions past; more recently, 2003 saw the arrival of at least ten birds in Britain, which heralded a series of good years, most notably 22 in 2009 and 12 in 2010, but all of them surpassed by the 30 birds in 2012 (more than 25% of all records).

Currently the best place to see Hornemann's Redpoll away from the breeding range seems to be the Northern Isles, and Shetland in particular. This year's influx also brought two more accessible and much-appreciated birds, in Norfolk and Suffolk. Many rushed for views as issues of listing



and taxonomy were laid aside in favour of a bird worth seeing for its aesthetic appeal alone.

The long-bodied, long-tailed and long-winged chassis of this bird is cloaked in a densely feathered plumage that gives many individuals a super-padded appearance. While the gestalt of Hornemann's can be quite distinctive, there are actually no diagnostic plumage characters that are not matched by some 'Coues's Redpolls' *C. h. exilipes*. Size,

preferably in comparison with other redpolls or finches, and a particularly deep-based bill are still essential to a firm identification. The bill is often set in a rich buff and fat-looking head, the colour of which contrasts with a notably pale mantle.

Further contributing to the identification challenge are the poorly understood, Arctic-like redpolls from Iceland, which are a clear source of potential confusion. Calls in particular are under-researched with some of the only recordings of Hornemann's coming from birds seen in Britain; the sonograms intimate recognisable differences from other redpoll taxa.

With the removal of Coues's Redpoll from the BBRC list, Hornemann's has come centre stage in a timely manner and is currently the more common of the two, suggesting that it's time to reconsider how BBRC relates to *exilipes*. A paper by Andy Stoddart, to be published shortly in *BB*, will provide a much-needed overview of the redpolls, including fresh material and insights.

The number of birds seen in the Outer Hebrides in 2012 was much debated. The Committee has taken a minimalist approach, presuming that just two birds accounted for all eight sightings. The opinion of the observers is that there were between six and eight birds in all. Without clear plumage differences, and with observations over a longish period where plumage could alter, we have to accept that this is ultimately a matter of opinion.

(Race *hornemanni* breeds Ellesmere & Baffin Island, Canada, & N Greenland S to Scorsby Sound. Disperses erratically to S of breeding range in winter, irregularly reaching NW Europe.)

## Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera* (73, 180, 2)

Norfolk Lynford Arboretum, two, adult male and female, 19th February, photo (J. Harris, A. & G. Williams *et al.*).

This is the eleventh Norfolk record of this attractive finch from Russia's boreal forests, and the first in that county involving more than a single bird. Sandringham remains the top site in the county with four records, but this pair at Lynford is the second record from that site, the first being a female from November 1990 to June 1991. Away from the Northern Isles, protracted stays remain few and far between, and lingering birds invariably attract a large audience. In summer 2013, Britain experienced what may yet prove to be largest and most wide-ranging invasion of Two-barred Crossbills on record, which will be described and set into context in the 2013 BBRC report.

(Palearctic race *bifasciata* breeds larch *Larix* forests of N Eurasia from N Scandinavia to E Siberia, reaching Sea of Okhotsk & S to Baikal region. Outside breeding season occasionally disperses as far as NW Europe. Nominate race *leucoptera* breeds across N North America.)



Andrew Jordan

**371.** First-winter 'Hornemann's Redpoll' *Carduelis h. hornemanni*, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, December 2012.





**372.** First-winter male Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*, Collafirth, Shetland, February 2013.

### **Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator* (4, 7, 1)**

Shetland Urafirth, Mainland, first-winter male, 1st–2nd November, photo (A. & M. Williamson); also seen in 2013 (see below; *Brit. Birds* 106: plates 117, 372).

Many birders noted the strong movement of Pine Grosbeaks in Scandinavia in autumn 2012 and wondered whether one would make it to Britain. For example, 2012 was only the third year the species had occurred on the Norwegian island of Utsira, less than 350 km from Shetland, with up to 50 there in November ([www.utsirafuglestasjon.no](http://www.utsirafuglestasjon.no)). Come the end of the year, it appeared that the opportunity had been missed yet, unbeknown at the time, a Pine Grosbeak was wintering unseen in a remote corner of Shetland.

Thursday, 1st November 2012 was a wet, grey day in Shetland, with a brief spell of easterly winds. The day was notable for an arrival of Waxwings *Bombycilla garrulus*, part of a near-record influx for the islands. A flock of 18 arrived in the garden of Alistair and Marcia Williamson, at Urafirth, in north Mainland. As they watched the Waxwings, they noticed another bird, which they photographed. The mystery bird was still present the next day. Alistair uploaded some photos to an album of birds on his Facebook page, asking if the bird was a Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*. Unfortunately, no birders noticed the post and the photos lurked unseen – just like the grosbeak itself – for several months.

On 29th January 2013, Bert Ratter was trying out a new camera and snapped a bird in his garden at Collafirth, about 7 km northeast of Urafirth. He sent the photo to Paul Sclater, a work colleague. When Paul returned to work after a few days off and checked his e-mails he was in for a surprise, as he knew immediately that he was looking at a Pine Grosbeak, photographed just a few days earlier! Birders headed out immediately to search for the bird, but they were unsuccessful. It was the following day, 2nd February, when it was relocated in yet another garden, a little further north, by Tim Cleaves, Phil Harris and Rebecca Nason, who were in Shetland for the Up Helly Aa fire festival. The final twist in the story came a day later, when Paul Sclater discovered Alistair Williamson's photos on Facebook, confirming what many had suspected – the bird had arrived the previous autumn.

The Pine Grosbeak, with its apparent aversion to crossing water, remains a great rarity in Britain. There are seven accepted post-1950 records: the Isle of May, on 8th–9th November 1954; two in Kent, East Malling on 2nd November 1957 and Cobtree, Maidstone, on 15th May 1971; Holy Island, Northumberland, on 11th–12th May 1975; two in Shetland, Lerwick from 25th



March to 25th April 1992, and Maywick on 9th November 2000; and Easington, Yorkshire, on 8th–10th November 2004. These show that a Pine Grosbeak could be found in Britain any time from late autumn right through to the following spring. Although six of the nine dated records have been found between 30th October and 8th November, one bird in the nineteenth century was obtained in ‘winter’ and three have been found in spring (one in late March and two in mid May).

Meanwhile, Utsira also had several Tengmalm’s Owls *Aegolius funereus* and a Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula* in autumn 2012: did those species also reach Britain but remain undiscovered?

(Resident or dispersive across N Scandinavia, E to E Siberia & Kamchatka, & S to Hokkaido, Japan. Widespread across much of N North America, E to Newfoundland & S through mountains to C California & N New Mexico.)

### Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* (0, 24, 2)

At Sea Sea Area Fair Isle, East Brae oil platform, first-winter male, 31st October, found dead, photo, specimen in the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh (I. D. Moig).

Isles of Scilly Hugh Town, St Mary’s, first-winter male, 18th–29th December, photo (K. Johnson *et al.* per birding information services) (*Brit. Birds* 106: plates 84, 373).

(Breeds C Canada to Nova Scotia & through Midwest & NE USA S to Maryland. Migrates through E USA to winter from C Mexico through C America to N South America.)



Joe Pender

**373.** First-winter male Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, St Mary’s, Scilly, December 2012.

### White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis* (2, 41, 1)

Highland Harrapool, Broadford, Skye, 20th May, photo (R. Charlesworth).

(Breeds North America from SE Yukon E to Newfoundland, S to Great Lakes & N USA to New Jersey. Winters SE USA, from Massachusetts S to Florida, Texas & into N Mexico & California.)

### Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis* (0, 38, 0)

Hampshire Hawkhill Inclosure, Beaulieu, first-winter male, 24th December 2011 to 1st February, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 616–617 (*Brit. Birds* 105: plates 102, 364).

(Breeds North America from N Alaska & N Canada, S to S California, N Texas & N Georgia. British records of forms previously recognised as Slate-coloured Junco, breeding throughout N & E of range, S to Georgia. Northern populations migratory, wintering to S of breeding range.)



### Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* (2, 48, 0)

2011 Shetland Clibberswick, Unst, first-winter female, 5th–7th November, photo, note revised dates, *Brit. Birds* 105: 617.

(Breeds Siberia from W Urals to upper Kolyma River, S to SE Kazakhstan, Mongolia, lower Amur River & Sakhalin. Isolated population breeds C China. Small wintering populations W Italy & C Israel. Otherwise winters S of breeding range from Turkestan E through Himalayan foothills to C & E China, N of Yangtze.)

### Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* (3, 3, 0)

2011 Yorkshire Bolton Abbey, male, 8th May, photo (per BTO) (plate 374).

This record was submitted to BBRC via the BTO, and their communications officer Paul Stancliffe takes up the story: ‘My job at the BTO often sees me identifying birds from photographs, most of them escaped parrots or odd pheasants (there seem to be a fair few of these at large). Every now and then a photograph lands on my desk that is a lot more interesting, and so it was with the one that appeared on Wednesday 11th May 2011. It was clearly a male Rock Bunting, but it was the location and the date that the photograph was taken that shocked me – Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire, on Sunday 8th May, only three days earlier! What’s more, I knew the observer; we both frequented the same nature reserve on a regular basis over 30 years earlier!’

The information from Paul and the photograph that accompanied it (plate 374) have led to the acceptance of Britain’s fifth record of Rock Bunting (there have been six individuals), the last of which was way back in June 1967, on Bardsey. The observer/photographer was not primarily a birdwatcher, hence his surprise at the excitement/incredulity that the record engendered. Some

hopeful souls visited the site to try to relocate the bird, but all they succeeded in doing was locating the twig on which the bird had been photographed! We investigated this claim, spoke to the finder, and came to the conclusion the record was perfectly genuine.

(Largely sedentary throughout Mediterranean basin from N Africa & Iberia, N to C France & S Germany, & E through Turkey, Caucasus region & Iran to E Kazakhstan & W Himalayas. Some populations dispersive or short-distance migrants.)

Observer's name withheld



**374.** Male Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*, Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire, May 2011.

### Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata* (0, 1, 1)

Shetland Virkie, Mainland, first-winter, 23rd–25th October, photo (R. M. Fray, I. S. Robertson et al.) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 430, 106: plates 292, 375).

Identification via digital photographs and the internet is hardly new, but this is another bird that might otherwise have been missed. It is the second for Britain and both birds masqueraded initially as skulking Little Buntings *E. pusilla* before being identified correctly. The first, on Fair Isle in October 2004, was glimpsed briefly around a crop near the South Light for more than a day; suspicions gradually mounted before the bird was eventually trapped (Shaw 2008). The Shetland bird in 2012 was first seen by Iain Robertson, who – not unreasonably – concluded that the ‘ticking’ bunting he saw briefly, diving into cover along the northern edge of the Pool of Virkie, was probably a Little Bunting. Since the bird was not far from Rob Fray’s house, Iain sent him a text and Rob duly went out with his camera and grabbed a few shots of the unco-operative bird.





Roger Riddington

**375.** First-winter Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*, Virkie, Shetland, October 2012.

Before heading to work, Rob uploaded a photo to the Nature in Shetland Facebook site. Without that photo (see *Brit. Birds* 106: 292), this might well have gone down as another Little Bunting, a species that is no longer a description species in Shetland.

Once online, that single photo began to attract interest; it, and another uploaded later that evening, was hardly conclusive, and several respected birders were still fairly sure that it was a Little Bunting, either in private or in public. Credit is due to those who stuck their neck out: Owen Foley and Jane Turner were the first to post comments online that queried the identity, Hugh Harrop posted to the Shetland grapevine suggesting that the bird looked like a Chestnut-eared Bunting, while Josh Jones took the decision to broadcast the news nationally on BirdGuides.

Even the sceptics knew that the bird needed checking out and a group of local birders were out early the next morning. Paul Harvey was the first to relocate the bird, and his initial brief view was enough to make him sure that it really did need pinning down. After leading observers a merry dance for an hour or so, the bird finally gave itself up and the identification was confirmed by a group including Mark Chapman, Rob Fray, Hugh Harrop and Paul Harvey. It seems entirely possible that others have been overlooked in the past, especially since there was another in the Western Palearctic between the two British records, at Understen, Uppland, Sweden, in October 2011. What is certain is that putative Little Buntings in late autumn will be more closely scrutinised in future.

(Nominate race breeds Siberia from Baikal region E to NE Mongolia & Russian Maritime Region, NE China, Korean Peninsula & Japan. Winters S Japan, Taiwan & S China, S to N Thailand. Other races largely sedentary or dispersive in W Himalayas to SE China.)

### **Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (7, 195, 5)**

Carmarthenshire Porthyrhyd, adult male, 18th–24th June, photo (A. & G. Evans, L. Hughes, C. McKee *et al.*); also seen Gower.

Gower Godre'r-graig, adult male, 17th June, photo (B. Wood); also seen Carmarthenshire.

Isles of Scilly Great Popplestone Bay, Bryher, male, 28th May, photo (R. J. G. Dawson *et al.*).

Orkney North Ronaldsay, male, 5th–13th August, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Grenitote, North Uist, female, 19th June, photo (I. Fulton).

Shetland Gloup, Yell, male, 29th May to 1st June, photo (E. Henderson, J. Nangle *et al.*).

1994 Radnorshire Rhayader, male, 3rd–12th June, photo (P. Jennings *et al.*).

The above crop of records fits neatly into an established pattern of occurrence for this species. In the past, the spectre of the escaped cagebird has been associated with this bunting (perhaps



justifiably given its popularity in captivity), but the clear peak of records in late May and June is consistent with overshooting migrants.

Geographical spread is a little harder to explain, with occurrences fairly evenly spread around east-, south- and west-facing coastlines – yet with an exceptional 15 from Highland. Shetland is the hotspot, with this year's bird bringing the total there to 51. Black-headed Bunting is more or less annual – you have to go back as far as 1981 to find a blank year – and there were peak counts of 15 in 2000 and 14 in 1992.

While males are gaudy and unmistakable, females and immatures are quite a different proposition and can be challenging for both finders and the Committee. Confusion with female/immature Red-headed Bunting *E. bruniceps* is the obvious problem; differences between the two are subtle to say the least, and few observers have extensive experience of young birds of either species in autumn. Some poorly seen birds fail to make the grade but a well-photographed and well-described individual should present few problems, as was the case with the North Uist female this year. Red-headed Bunting currently resides in Categories D & E of the British List, with few having been reported since the ban on importation from the Indian subcontinent for the European captive-bird trade.

(Breeds C Italy to Greece, Turkey, N Iraq, W Iran, & N through Caucasus to Ukraine & S Russia. Winters W & C India.)

### **Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* (0, 31, 1)**

Shetland Brake, Mainland, 28th October, photo (P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*) (plate 376).

(Breeds widely across S Canada & N USA, S to NE California & New Jersey. Winters Peru to S Brazil & N Argentina.)



**376.** Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, Brake, Shetland, October 2012.

### **Northern Waterthrush *Parkesia noveboracensis* (0, 7, 0)**

Isles of Scilly Lower Moors, St Mary's, 16th September 2011 to 16th April, trapped, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 619–620.

Stays of over 100 days for a New World passerine are very rare; a couple of Baltimore Orioles *Icterus galbula* in 1989 and 1991/92, and a Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas* in 1989 are all that we can find in the database. But this bird was able to raise its bat for the double century, eventually staying some 214 days. The dense, wet undergrowth of Lower Moors, coupled with a mild Scilly winter, clearly meant that the bird had little urge to move on. There was even expectation that it might start singing in spring (if a male) but 'suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished' (Robert Browning).

(Breeds C Alaska E across Canada to Labrador & Newfoundland, & S to N USA from N Idaho to Massachusetts. Migrates through E USA to winter from Mexico & Cuba S to N South America.)



**Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas* (0, 9, 1)**

Gwent Rhiwderin, Newport, first-winter male, 10th February to 31st March, photo (M. Broome, C. Jones *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plates 139, 164; plate 377).

Autumn 2011 produced four species of American wood-warbler, with Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*, Northern Waterthrush, Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* and Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata* recorded. This Yellowthroat would have been a fifth had it been discovered earlier in its stay, as it must surely have arrived the previous autumn and overwintered, as did the long-staying Northern Waterthrush (see above). In only three years has a score of five Parulid species been exceeded in Britain: in 1982 with seven, 1985 with eight and 1995 with six.



John Carter

**377.** First-winter male Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*, Rhiwderin, Newport, Gwent, March 2012.

Much has been written about the decline in North American warblers reaching our shores. Suggestions for the reasons why range from changing North Atlantic weather patterns to habitat loss (notably deforestation) in their wintering grounds. The Common Yellowthroat has remained a rare but fairly regular visitor since the first in 1954 with three in both the 1980s and 1990s; and this is now the third since 2000. This is a fairly short-distance migrant; many winter in the southern USA and Mexico and, being a bird of open, often marshy, country, it may be that the factors affecting some other woodland species do not apply here.

(Breeds North America from SE Alaska E to Newfoundland, S to C California & S Texas, & Oaxaca & Vera Cruz, Mexico. Winters S USA, S through Mexico to Panama.)

**Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia* (0, 1, 1)**

Fair Isle Lerness, male, 23rd September, photo (W. T. S. Miles, J. Moss *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 409; plate 378, fig. 4).

Found late on a Sunday afternoon, this brightly coloured gem put on an excellent display, lit by the setting sun as it fed along the cliffs at Lerness, allowing all birders staying on the island to soak up an unforgettable experience. This bird, the second for Britain, was the highlight of a classic Fair Isle autumn, with birds arriving from North America and Siberia on the same day. Its chosen location on



Steve Arlow

**378.** Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia*, Fair Isle, September 2012.





**Fig. 4.** Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia* and Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope*, Fair Isle, autumn 2012.

the west cliffs, one of the least-often visited parts of the island, was sobering evidence that every inch of Fair Isle needs checking! The experience was reminiscent of the Blackburnian Warbler *S. fusca* that arrived on the same island in October 1988 and, like that individual, desperate for a leafy canopy, it didn't linger.

Magnolia Warbler has an extensive breeding range in North America and its population appears to be increasing ([www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)). It is, however, a comparatively short-distance migrant and has a fairly restricted winter range, from eastern Mexico south to Panama and partially to the Greater Antilles. Like many of its contemporaries, it is a common migrant along the Atlantic seaboard, but probably does not undertake extended sea crossings, making it less prone to vagrancy than the more regularly occurring Blackpoll Warbler, which migrates to northeast South America. This may have some bearing on its extreme rarity here and the lengthy (31-year) gap between this and the first British record.

(Breeds from C British Columbia E to Newfoundland, and S in USA to Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan to C West Virginia, NE Pennsylvania and NW New Jersey. Migratory, winters from C Mexico through C America to Costa Rica and West Indies.)

### **Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata* (0, 43, 2)**

Isles of Scilly Samson Hill and Green Bay, Bryher, 11th–18th October, photo (P. A. Dukes, P. Nichols *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 431). Content Lane, St Mary's, 28th–29th October, photo (P. Aley, P. Kemp *et al.*).

(Breeds North America from W Alaska E throughout Canada to Newfoundland, & S to Maine, USA. Migrates through E USA to winter NE South America.)



**Appendix 1. Records of former BBRC species, removed from the list prior to 2012**

**Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (163, 446, –)**

1999 Cheshire & Wirral Elton Hall Flash, first-summer, 2nd June, note revised year, previously listed as 2000, *Brit. Birds* 94: 457.

(Widespread but local throughout Mediterranean basin & N to France, Belgium & occasionally Netherlands. Elsewhere, breeds Morocco, Ukraine, Turkey & throughout Indian subcontinent & SE Asia N to Japan, & locally throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Widespread North & South America.)

**Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (4, 445, –)**

2004 Fife Fife Ness Muir, two, 24th–25th August, one trapped (A. W. Lauder, G. Owens, R. Shand *et al.*), previously recorded as three birds in total, now thought to be just two, with one trapped on last date, *Brit. Birds* 98: 678; 100: 86–87.

(European & W Siberian race *viridanus* breeds E Poland, Baltic countries & S Finland, & sporadically Germany, Sweden & Norway. To E, breeds through Russia & W Siberia to Yenisey River, S through NW Mongolia to N Afghanistan & NW Himalayas. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent. Other races occur throughout Himalayas to SW China, wintering from Indian subcontinent to Indochina & N Thailand.)

**Appendix 2. Records where identification accepted, but placed in Category D (see *Ibis* 136: 253)**

**Ross's Goose *Anser rossii***

Cumbria Burgh Marsh, Rockcliffe Marsh and Cardurnock, adult, 14th December 2011 to 9th April, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 622–624; also seen Dumfries & Galloway.

Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT, adult, 13th October 2011 to 6th March, photo (per birding information services); also seen Cumbria.

Northumberland East Chevington, adult, 25th–26th February, photo (M. S. Hodgson *et al.*) (plate 379); presumed same Budle Bay, 11th March, photo (M. S. Hodgson, C. G. Knox).

(Breeds on tundra of Canadian Arctic, from Perry River region of Northwest Territories to N Manitoba, including Southampton Island, E to N Ontario. Most migrate across C USA to wintering grounds in S USA. Numbers increasing on Atlantic seaboard of USA & N Mexico.)



Frank Golding

**379.** Adult Ross's Goose *Anser rossii*, with Pink-footed Geese *A. brachyrhynchus*, East Chevington, Northumberland, February 2012.

**Falcated Duck *Anas falcata***

Oxfordshire Farmoor Resr, adult male, 9th–13th December, photo (D. M. John *et al.*) (plate 380).

Another winter record of this east Asian duck, this one arriving with an influx of Mallards *A. platyrhynchos* at a well-watched site. Although the Mallard is not the most convincing of travelling companions, ringing recoveries demonstrate that they do travel long distances, with 320 exchanges between western Russia and Britain & Ireland (overwhelmingly birds ringed here during the winter months and later shot in Russia). Others from Britain have reached Kazakhstan, Georgia, Turkey and Canada (Robinson & Clark 2013). Birders who have visited Japan in





380. Adult male Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*, Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire, December 2012.

winter will attest to the habitat preferences of Falcated Ducks: in addition to ‘natural’ sites, they will associate with other ducks on town park lakes and join in the scramble for handouts.

In the Netherlands, where there is no Category D or equivalent, Falcated Duck features on the national list with 11 accepted records to the end of 2011 (Ovaa *et al.* 2012). Berlijn (2007) reviewed all records from the Western Palearctic and found that most occurred between October and June, which fits the main period when migratory wildfowl species occur in temperate latitudes. These records are evenly spread over several decades, and include two from the nineteenth century. Since Falcated Duck breeds in cool temperate latitudes in Siberia and northern Japan, it could be argued that occasional May and June records are compatible with birds summering at latitudes similar to those where they breed – a comparable situation exists with Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* in Britain, which also breeds at similar latitudes, where five of the 15 post-1950 records have been in May and June.

Falcated Duck is a relatively rare species. Although the global population has recently been revised upwards to 89,000 individuals (Cao *et al.* 2008), BirdLife International still considers it to be Near Threatened as the wintering population appears to be declining in southern China, and overall the species is suspected to be undergoing a moderate decline ([www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)). By comparison, the global population estimate for Baikal Teal *A. formosa* in 2007 was 490,000 individuals (Cao *et al.* 2008), although around 1.06 million were counted in South Korea in January 2009 ([www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)).

(Breeds E Siberia from Yenisey River & Baikal region E to Sea of Okhotsk & S to NE China & Hokkaido, Japan. Winters from S Japan to SE China, locally W to Nepal.)

### Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*

2008 Norfolk Wissington, seen intermittently 25th October to 7th December, photo (C. Donner).  
1998 Hertfordshire Hilfield Park Resr, 21st–24th April (G. Elton, S. Murray, J. Thompson *et al.*).

(Breeds N Morocco & S Spain, & Turkey E to S Kazakhstan. Migratory & disperses outside breeding season. Many Spanish breeders move NE in late summer to Ebro Delta, NE Spain. Some reach Africa, with small numbers reaching Senegal, Mali & Chad. Asian population winters mostly Iran.)

## Appendix 3. Records where identification accepted, but considered a likely escape and placed in Category E (see *Ibis* 136: 253)

### Ross's Goose *Anser rossii*

Norfolk Berney Marshes RSPB and Great Yarmouth, two adults, 28th November to 18th December 2011, one remaining to 10th February (P. R. Allard, J. Burton *et al.*), presumed same as Northumberland 2011, *Brit. Birds* 105: 624.

2008 Northumberland Hedgeley Ponds and Hauxley, adult, 27th April to 2nd May, photo (M. J.



Carr, K. Davison, M. S. Hodgson *et al.*), previously listed as not proven but now accepted after additional information submitted, *Brit. Birds* 105: 624–625.

(Breeds on tundra of Canadian Arctic, from Perry River region of Northwest Territories to N Manitoba, including Southampton Island, E to N Ontario. Most migrate across C USA to wintering grounds in S USA. Numbers increasing on Atlantic seaboard of USA & N Mexico.)

### Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*

Argyll Loch Riddon, Cowal, 5th–7th June, photo (G. Clark de Bisschop *et al.*).

Cumbria Lowther Park, 21st March, photo (N. Thomas *et al.* per Cumbria Recorder).

Sussex Upper Beeding and Adur Valley, 13th December into 2013, photo (A. R. Kitson).

Yorkshire Harwood Dale, Cloughton, first-winter, 30th November 2011 to 7th January, photo, see also *Brit. Birds* 105: 624.

2010 Lancashire & North Merseyside Martin Mere WWT and south to Prescott area, adult, 28th September 2003 to 7th December, photo (J. Watson *et al.*).

(Breeds Taimyr Peninsula, Siberia. Migrates SW to winter coastal regions of W Black Sea in Romania & N Bulgaria. Small numbers regularly winter Netherlands, Greece & Turkey. Some may still use former wintering areas along Caspian Sea.)

### Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*

2008 Highland Loch Morlich, female, 1st January to 2nd April, photo (M. Coath, S. Gilbertson *et al.*).

2007 Cheshire & Wirral Inner Marsh Farm RSPB, male, 28th May, photo (P. Woollen).

2007 Yorkshire Winterset Resr, female, 15th–17th May, photo (S. Penny, P. Smith).

2006 Cheshire & Wirral Weaver Navigation, female, 6th August, photo (P. Woollen).

BBRC considers that none of the records published above are likely to refer to genuine vagrants. Some BBRC members consider that the male on mainland Shetland from 16th April to 20th June 2009 is a potential candidate for genuine vagrancy, although there is little consensus and we recognise that this view is not necessarily supported by local observers or even the finder, Rob Fray. This record has been forwarded to BOURC. BOU (2012) reported that two records of this species were recently considered in relation to potential vagrancy by BOURC. That review started just before the discovery of the Shetland bird and therefore did not include that record. It is unlikely that another BOURC review of this species will take place in the near future, unless a ringed bird or material that enables stable-isotope analysis is provided to support the case for transatlantic vagrancy (C. McNerny *in litt.*). We shall refrain from publishing a decision on the Shetland record until this process has been undertaken, treating it like other records that are awaiting BOURC's deliberation.

(Breeds S Canada from S British Columbia to Nova Scotia, S to California & throughout most of USA E of Rocky Mountains to Texas & Florida. Northern breeders winter to S of breeding range.)

## Appendix 4. List of records not accepted

2012 Red-breasted Goose Peterhead, North-east Scotland, 22nd May. Lesser Scaup Loch of Ayre, Mainland, Orkney, 18th–27th December. King Eider Holkham Gap, Norfolk, two, 17th January. Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri* Portland, Dorset, 18th November. Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* Stag Rocks, Bamburgh, Northumberland, 20th March. Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* Sheringham, Norfolk, 29th November. Fraserburgh, North-east Scotland, 26th September. Glossy Ibis Alvaston, Derbyshire, 13th April. Pallid Harrier Marshside Marsh, Lancashire & North Merseyside, 8th October. Donna Nook, Lincolnshire, 11th May. Long Buckby, Northamptonshire, 28th May. Eleonora's Falcon Ramsgate, Kent, 19th August. Baillon's Crake Woolston Eyes, Warrington, Cheshire & Wirral, 22nd April. Pacific Golden Plover Stodmarsh, Kent, 8th July. Baird's Sandpiper Cresswell Ponds, Northumberland, 16th September. Spotted Sandpiper River Dove, between Fauld and Scropton, Derbyshire and Staffordshire, 1st–5th September. Marsh Sandpiper Hickling Broad, Norfolk, 14th August. Great Snipe Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, Outer



Hebrides, 26th September. **Gull-billed Tern** Flamborough Head, Yorkshire, 18th September. **Caspian Tern** Stiffkey Fen, Norfolk, 9th August. **Whiskered Tern** Whitby, Yorkshire, 10th June. **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* Isley Marsh, River Taw, Devon, 20th October. **Bonaparte's Gull** Burrafirth, Unst, Shetland, 30th September. Eastbourne, Sussex, 4th–6th August. **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* Earls Barton GP, Northamptonshire, 22nd January. **Snowy Owl** Keynsham, Avon, 11th February. Red Point, Caithness, 8th July. **Pallid Swift** Titchfield Haven, Hampshire, 12th July. Barden Scale, Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire, 12th April. **Plain Swift** *Apus unicolor* Fairburn Ings RSPB, Yorkshire, 29th July. **Little Swift** Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire, 9th May. **Penduline Tit** Minsmere RSPB, Suffolk, 27th October. **Hume's Warbler** Cambois, Blyth, Northumberland, 11th October. **Iberian Chiffchaff** Coombe Hill Meadows, Gloucestershire, 30th April to 2nd May. Elvetham Heath, Hampshire, 6th April. **River Warbler** Burwick, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, 24th September. **Savi's Warbler** Skinflats, Upper Forth, 27th May. **Blyth's Reed Warbler** Fleetwood, Lancashire & North Merseyside, 28th September. **White's Thrush** Cot Valley, Cornwall, 8th October. St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, 27th September. **Siberian Thrush** *Geokichla sibirica* Holm, Mainland, Orkney, 14th October. **Siberian Stonechat** Holy Island, Northumberland, 28th April. **Olive-backed Pipit** St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, 26th September. **'African Chaffinch'** *Fringilla coelebs spodiogenys/africana* Derwenlas, Ceredigion, 17th March. **Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus* St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 10th June. **Black-headed Bunting** Tarskavaig, Skye, Highland, 28th July.

**2011 Blue-winged Teal** Thursley Common, Surrey, 17th August. Wheldrake Ings, Yorkshire, 18th–21st April. **Fea's Petrel** Lowestoft Ness, Suffolk, 15th September. **Madeiran Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma castro* Pendeen Watch, Cornwall, 6th September. **Glossy Ibis** Avenue Washlands, Wingerworth, Derbyshire, 11th November. **Pallid Harrier** Lunan Bay, Angus & Dundee, 4th October. Brancaster, Norfolk, 17th October. **Gyr Falcon** Cawdor, Moray & Nairn, 28th January. **Baird's Sandpiper** Loch Stiapavat, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 12th–18th October. **Hume's Warbler** Bawdsey, Suffolk, 8th November. **Blyth's Reed Warbler** Dronger, Fair Isle, 5th November. **Siberian Thrush** Bosistow, Cornwall, 17th November. **Olive-backed Pipit** Quendale, Mainland, Shetland, 9th October. **Two-barred Crossbill** Tring, Hertfordshire, 23rd October.

**2010 Black Stork** Batsford Arboretum, Gloucestershire, 24th April. **Lesser Yellowlegs** Marsh Lane, West Midlands, 17th October. **Marsh Sandpiper** Eling Great Marsh, Hampshire, 30th August. **Penduline Tit** Dawlish Warren, Devon, 11th October. **Iberian Chiffchaff** Little Malvern, Worcestershire, 9th April to 1st May.

**2009 Sykes's Warbler** Nanquidno, Cornwall, 13th October. **Two-barred Crossbill** Cockley Cley, Norfolk, 11th January.

**2004 Black Scoter** Staveley Lagoon, Yorkshire, 11th August. **Dark-breasted Barn Owl** Gunnista, Bressay, Shetland, 16th October.

**1999 Lesser Scaup** Great Pool, Tresco, Isles of Scilly, 27th–28th October.

**1976 Caspian Tern** Spurn, Yorkshire, 4th August.

**1964 Frigatebird** *Fregata* Whitburn CP, Durham, 10th July.

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# Conservation research news

Compiled by Guy Anderson, David Douglas, Will Kirby and John Mallord

## Weeds: the Corn Bunting's best friend

Recent declines in the UK Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* population have been precipitous, with losses of 88% between 1967 and 2010. Such declines extend across Europe and, despite the widespread introduction of agri-environment schemes, with measures specifically designed to help farmland birds, national population trends of Corn Buntings remain stubbornly negative.

Two recently published studies, undertaken on now-isolated populations in Cornwall and eastern Scotland, have linked territory choice and overall breeding performance to extensively managed (and therefore more weedy) cereal crops. The study in Scotland benefited from a long-term (20-year) dataset, collected by Adam Watson, centred on a coastal farmland population that had declined by 91%. By far the best predictor of territory location was the abundance of weeds, which declined by up to 50% between 1989 and 2008. Other favoured features were the presence of overhead wires (used by singing males), winter barley, spring cereals, forage grass and fallow land. During the period of decline, Corn Buntings vacated the poorest territories first, and those males occupying the best-quality territories were more likely to have additional females (Corn Buntings are frequently polygynous).

Overlapping with the above study in time but at about as far away as UK Corn Buntings can be, a study on the small population on the north coast of Cornwall found a similar association with breeding birds and weedy cereal fields. Here, 14 fields of spring-sown barley close to known breeding sites were extensively managed, with low inputs and no weed control, as a deliberate conservation measure for Corn Buntings. In most cases the crops were left unharvested to provide winter food for farmland birds. Other habitats in the area included intensive (conventionally managed) cereal crops and both cropped and grazed grass.

Female Corn Buntings nesting in extensively managed crops were four times more likely to renest than those in conventional crops, producing 26% more chicks over the season. Very few second broods were attempted in conventional cereals with females either giving up early or relocating to other habitats. During the course of the study the proportion of females nesting in extensive crops increased progressively, suggesting that any benefits of increased productivity could accrue rapidly. While this demonstrated and quantified the benefits of the extensively managed cereals, it remains to be seen whether this measure alone will be enough to sustain this small and isolated population.

It is perhaps unsurprising that these studies have shown the importance of weedy crops to Corn Buntings, but persuading farmers to embrace weeds within their crops for conservation reasons is not always easy. Options already exist in current agri-environment schemes that promote extensive in-field cropping but, in general, field-edge and boundary options are favoured by land managers. Nonetheless, providing strong evidence through targeted studies helps greatly in the design, advocacy and promotion of new and existing options within the wider agricultural landscape, and will hopefully lead to a more secure future for farmland birds like the Corn Bunting.

Perkins, A. J., Watson, A., Maggs, H. E., & Wilson J. D. 2012. Conservation insights from changing associations between habitat, territory distribution and mating system of Corn Buntings *Emberiza calandra* over a 20-year population decline. *Ibis* 154: 601–615.

Setchfield, R. P., Mucklow, C., Davey, A., Bradter, U., & Anderson, G. Q. 2012. An agri-environment option boosts productivity of Corn Buntings *Emberiza calandra* in the UK. *Ibis* 154: 235–247.



## Stuffed cats can still kill birds: indirect effects of predators revealed

The potential role of predators in the declines of wild bird populations is a complex and contentious issue – and never more so than in the case of domestic cats *Felis catus*. Studies have clearly shown how many millions of birds (as well as an even greater number of small mammals) are killed by cats each year, yet robust evidence for domestic cats having *population-level* effects on birds in the UK, Europe or North America is notably lacking. To add further complexity and intrigue, a recent study has shown that, in addition to direct mortality, cats can also have additional, indirect, effects on bird nesting success. Researchers from the Universities of Sheffield and Exeter exposed active Blackbird *Turdus merula* nests to a taxidermist's model of a domestic cat by placing it nearby for a short period, and measured the responses of the parent birds in terms of alarm calling, aggressive behaviour and provisioning rates, and nest survival over the following 24 hours. These data were compared with the equivalent from nests exposed to models of a Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* (another potential nest predator), and a non-threatening control (Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*).

Alarm calling by parent Blackbirds increased when exposed to the cat model more than it did for birds exposed to either of the other two species at most nest stages, as did direct aggression, but this was only significant when large chicks were in the nest. In contrast, parental provisioning rates were greatly reduced after exposure to the cat model, and did not return to normal during the next 90 minutes of observation, increasing the potential for reduced nestling growth rates. However, perhaps the most surprising and important result was that the rate of real nest predation was significantly higher following exposure to the cat than the squirrel or rabbit models (23% v 5% v 0%, respectively). It was also found that the probability of nest predation within 24 hours of model exposure increased with the amount of parental nest defence – which they had already demonstrated was greatly enhanced when birds were exposed to the cat model.

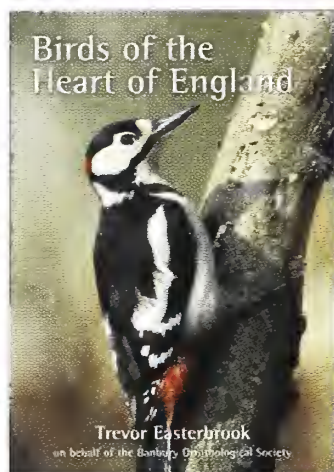
So, the more that the parent birds react to the model predator, the greater the chance of suffering real nest predation. Based on the state of the nests after predation, the authors suggested that corvids were the main real predators, and that they had been attracted to the vicinity of the nest by the increase in alarm calling and aggressive behaviour induced by the cat model.

The implications of this fascinating study are both far-reaching and serious. In addition to direct mortality, the mere presence of domestic cats could reduce the breeding success of birds nesting in urban environments, if such interactions with other predators take place. They are also potentially controversial: existing mitigation measures to reduce direct mortality of wildlife by cats, for example by placing bells on collars, might increase the detectability of cats (and hence reduce the predation rate on free-flying birds), but it may also have unforeseen consequences for the survival of nests. The authors suggest that the only humane management option to simultaneously reduce direct mortality and indirect effects of domestic cats on nesting success would be to permanently house cats indoors, but they concede that 'there are likely to be strong cultural barriers in achieving this'.

This study looked only at one bird species and it could be argued that the Blackbird is among the most likely species to show such an effect, since Blackbirds typically respond vigorously and noisily to potential predators. So whether or not this result applies more generally to other species is unknown at present. But the potential for such indirect effects of predator presence to apply to virtually any combination of predators and prey species is worth considering. Something to prey on the mind of any avian ecologist...

Bonnington, C., Gaston, K. J., & Evans, K. L. 2013. Fearing the feline: domestic cats reduce avian fecundity through trait-mediated indirect effects that increase nest predation by other species. *J. Appl. Ecol.* 50: 15–24.





## Birds of the Heart of England

Edited by Trevor Easterbrook on behalf of the Banbury Ornithological Society

Liverpool University Press, 2013

Hbk, 202pp; many colour photographs, maps and tables

ISBN 978-1-84631-885-6 Subbuteo code M21845

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This attractive volume provides an object lesson in what can be achieved by the regular and systematic monitoring of all the birds in a particular region. In this case it is the recording area of the Banbury Ornithological Society (BOS), a block of 12 (4x3) 10-km squares surrounding Banbury (which is in Oxfordshire, but the recording area also includes parts of Northamptonshire and Warwickshire). The book draws upon the results of surveys that have been carried out since 1952.

The BOS area does not contain any large water-bodies or significantly important habitats but is a typical lowland agricultural area in the middle of England. Thus, most of the information collected relates to the commoner farmland and woodland species, with rather few records of scarce migrants and rarities. The Society initiated a number of survey techniques, which are described in the book. The Annual Breeding Season Survey, started in 1961, is a rolling programme to monitor the changes in population of 26 species that were neither rare nor very common at that time, for example Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* and Willow Tit *Poecile montana*. The Winter Random Square Survey, started in 1975, is designed to collect information on the abundance and distribution of some of the most common species by means of timed counts in randomly collected 1-km squares. This survey has continued in every winter since then. A similar summer survey commenced in 1991.

The book contains the results of these surveys, which convincingly demonstrate the decline of many farmland and woodland species in the area.

The book contains introductory chapters explaining the survey methods, and describes the terrain of the BOS area and the habitat changes which have occurred in the past 60 years. The systematic list comprises remarkably succinct species accounts (in contrast to some recent county avi-faunas!), with excellent use of multicoloured charts and tables to illustrate population changes and monthly distribution of records, and 1-km distribution maps – often comparing different time periods. Those for the Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, for example, are particularly illuminating: there were very few registrations in the period 1982–91, but the species occupied virtually every square, apart from some in the east of the area, in 2002–11. There is a short chapter summarising the bird population changes over the 60 years of survey work. A brief conclusion sets out the importance of continuing to collect such data, not least to provide information to inform planning decisions on both a small and a large scale, including the proposed high-speed rail line HS2, which may cut through the area.

This is one of a series of excellent county publications produced recently by the non-profit-making Liverpool University Press and is highly recommended for anyone interested in the systematic monitoring of birds in their home area.

*John Clark*

## The Birds of Blashford Lakes

By Simon Woolley; Lulu Publishing, 2013; pbk, 170pp; black-and-white photographs, many figures; £8.00 plus P&P, available from [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

This book analyses the birds that have occurred at this excellent Hampshire Wildlife Trust reserve in south-west Hampshire. The bulk of the book comprises the systematic list, which is up to date and suitably detailed to answer most questions about the site. For regular visitors this is an invaluable resource and very good value for money. Hopefully a future edition will be more thoroughly researched, particularly with regard to earlier records. *John Clark* [Read a fuller review at [www.britishbirds.co.uk/category/book-reviews](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/category/book-reviews)]

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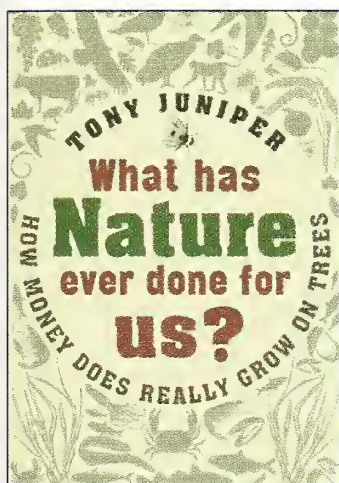


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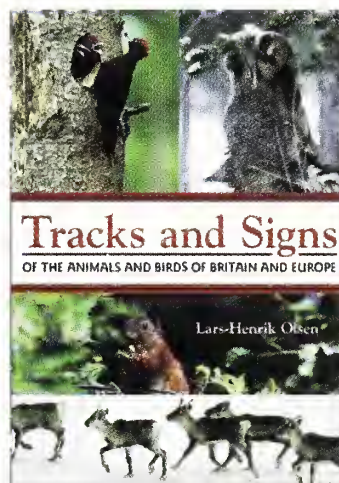
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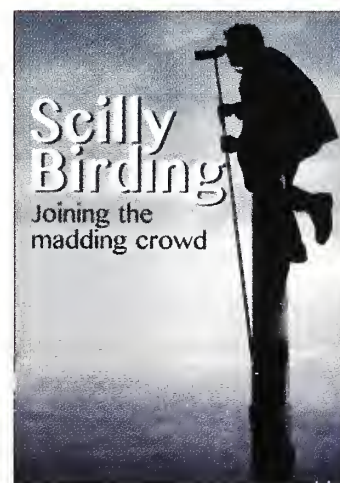
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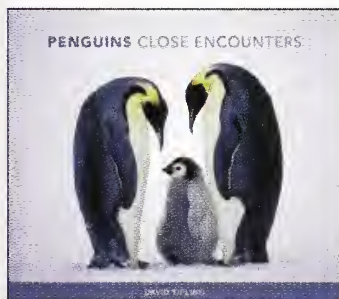
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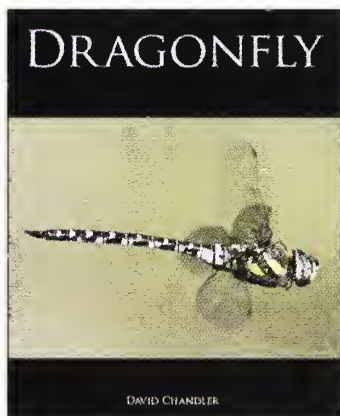
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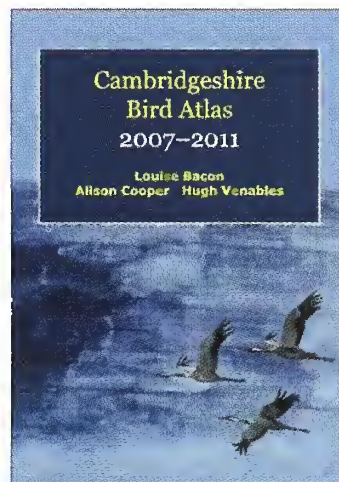
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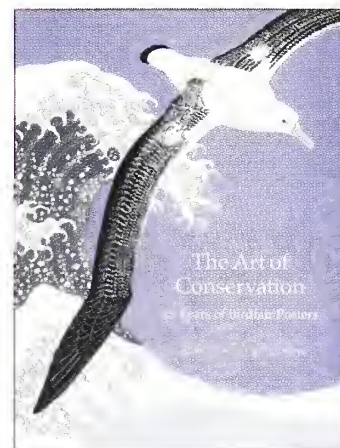
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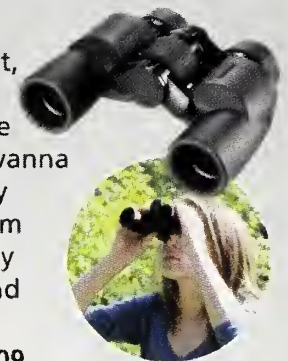
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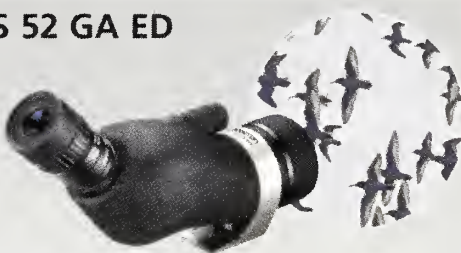
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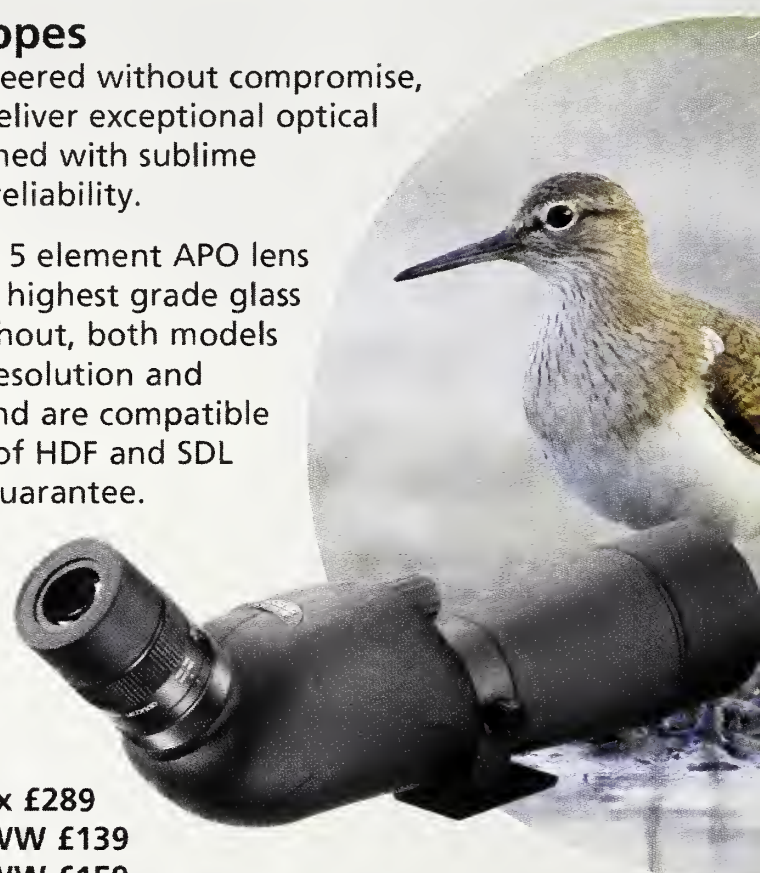
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